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# TLS

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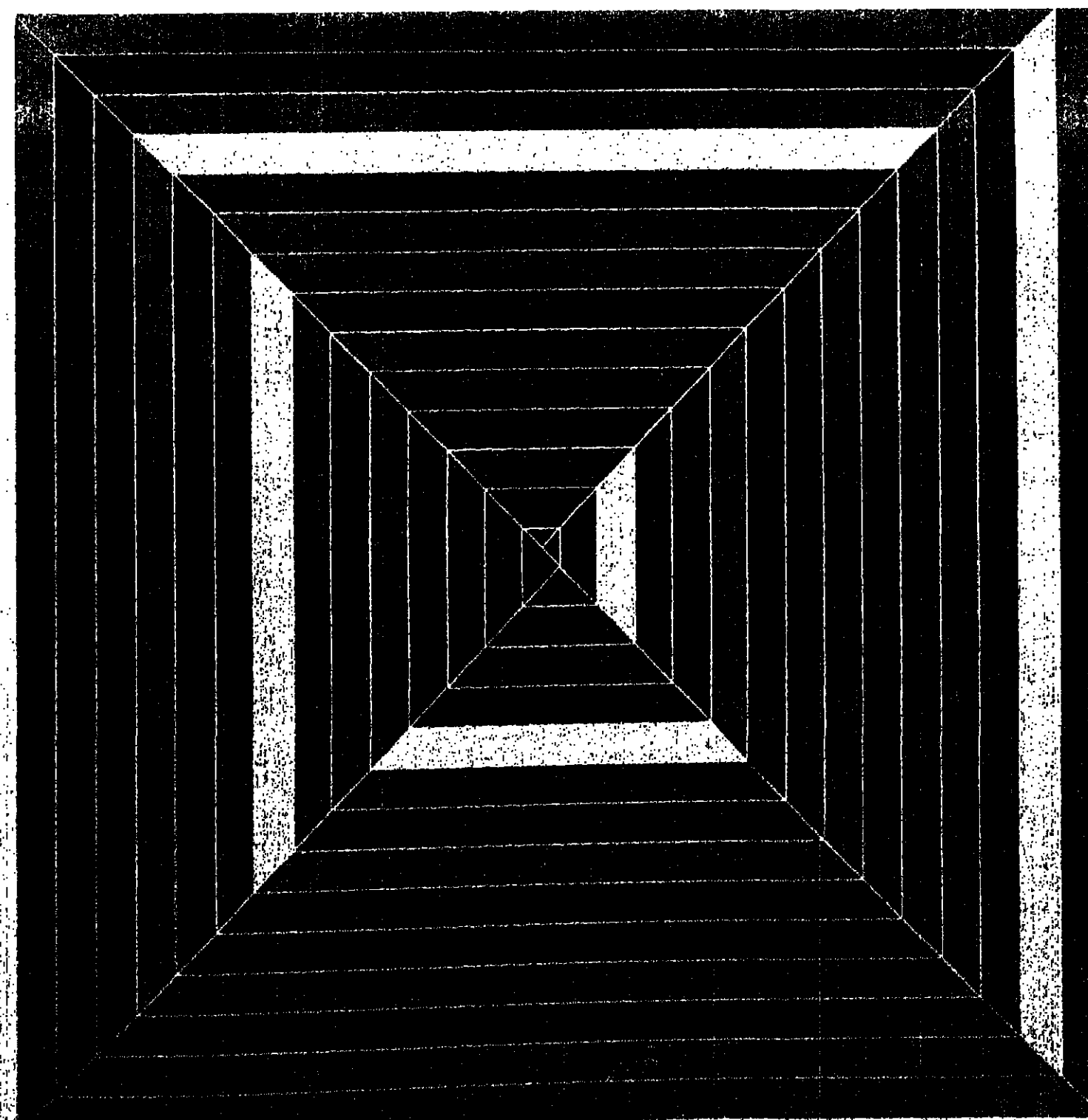
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"Hyena Stamp", 1962, alkyl on canvas, by Frank Stella; reproduced from Lawrence Rubin's *Frank Stella Paintings 1958 to 1965: A catalogue raisonné*, reviewed on pages 311-12.

Cover picture

## The expansive imagination

### John Golding

FRANK STELLA  
*Working Space*  
177pp. Harvard University Press. £25.50 (paperback, £12.75).  
0674999604  
LAWRENCE RUBIN  
*Frank Stella Paintings 1958 to 1965: A catalogue raisonné*  
279pp. Thames and Hudson. £40.  
0800973377

When painters write they often do so very well and we are grateful to them for their journals, memoirs, theoretical statements, pronouncements and aphorisms. But it is seldom that a major artist is prepared to commit himself publicly to a considered, large-scale survey of the art of his time, and to relate it moreover to substantial cross-sections of the art of the past. Frank Stella has done this in his Charles Eliot Norton Lectures at Harvard, with considerable erudition, great verve and genuine originality.

The *Working Space* of the title is Stella's plea for the reintroduction of greater spatial expansiveness, expressiveness and experiment into contemporary art: "What painting wants more than anything else is working space—space to grow into and expand into." He feels—knows, indeed—that abstraction is the real, the great art of our time; but he is appalled by the dullness and flatness which he sees as characterizing so much abstract painting of recent years and which he finds shallow in every sense of the word: too "close-valued", too conservative, too introverted, too much conditioned by technique. He believes that contemporary abstraction is also impoverished because it can relate only to pioneering abstraction and the art which immediately produced it. Impressionism and Cubism, both of which he sees as being themselves fundamentally conservative and unadventurous. The possibilities and lessons of the art of the past have been cut off

from us and the cost has been devastating. Even the heroism of Mondrian is in danger of being forgotten; Barnett Newman's legacy has somehow turned to ashes. Neither is there any breath of prophecy in today's abstraction: "We seem to be enmeshed in a difficult present." At a subsidiary level the title of the book reflects Stella's fascination with artists' methods and the conditions in which they work—the squalors and the splendours of Caravaggio's studio at The Eight Corners in Rome, Kandinsky at his easel in Paris.

Less explicitly the book is also an apologia for the baroque in art, for an art which is spatially complex and full and which is informed by sweeping movements and gestures, by balanced dissonances and disharmonies. Stella can respond to the grave and the dignified, and there are beautiful and revealing passages on Vermeer's "Allegory of Painting" and on Caravaggio's "Madonna of the Rosary". But basically he is drawn to art that is extrovert or outgoing and in which there is at least potential drama. If he seems nevertheless to be more attracted by the sixteenth century than by the seventeenth, this is because revelation has come to him through Italian art; and while he responds to the element of theatre that informs much of Italian sixteenth-century art, and in particular that of Venice, he is repelled by the theatricality of much Italian art that succeeded it. Rubens is a hero partly at least because more than any other artist he learnt the lessons of Italy. But on the whole Stella is less good on art that is quiet and reflective and gives itself to us slowly. He has surprisingly little to say about Cézanne. Rothko puts in no appearance in these pages, and, even more surprisingly, neither does Braque, surely one of the two or three most spatially conscious and inventive of twentieth-century artists.

Stella's great passion and exemplar is Caravaggio. Caravaggio's painting is an enterprise that is spatially independent and self-controlled: "Painting before Caravaggio could move backwards, it could step sideways, it

could climb walls, but it could not create its own destiny." Stella sees Caravaggio as enlarging Renaissance painting by inventing a "more flexible container" for Venetian painterliness, a container flexible enough, moreover, to accommodate the spatially more dramatic and diagrammatically perspectival art of Rome. Since Caravaggio places his action in the middle ground, the foreground tends to advance towards the spectator, inviting him to step into it. The soft, dark background areas also invite penetration; however, as Stella perceptively remarks, when in imagination we begin exploring this background space, feeling our way around the volumetrically rendered figures, after, so to speak, getting behind them views but rather their mirror images. Further on, Stella suggests that at moments Caravaggio is saying "illusionism is still a one-way, dead-end street", and if this would have been news to Caravaggio the point is well and ingeniously argued. But to an artist whose vision was formed in the 1950s, Caravaggio has also the attraction of being simultaneously a very flat painter; the muscular interactions of the limbs of his figures create spatial tensions across the surface as well as into depth; they are eminently fleshy and tactile, but the tactility is also that of paint, of pigment applied to a two-dimensional surface. Then again, Caravaggio is a supremely frontal and confrontational painter, and these qualities are reinforced by his use of a single dramatic light source which generally comes from above. Furthermore, Stella has been touched by the Greenbergian view that every painting must justify itself in its own terms, and when we think of Caravaggio we tend to think of individual paintings rather than groups or sequences of paintings, or of his development.

Stella sees Rubens as taking up and in turn expanding Caravaggio's space, while retaining Titian's painterliness and colour. Even more than Caravaggio he involves the spectator in the spatial drama of his art. Looking at certain

Rubenses, "we should see ourselves on a pedestal if we want to be true viewers of painting, because elevated on a pedestal we will surely be reminded of the space all around us—the space behind us, next to us, below us, and above us—in addition, of course, to the space in front of us, which we have so often taken as being the only space available to viewers. No one makes it clearer than Rubens how dearly painting wants to use all the space available to the human imagination." One senses that Stella is less directly and deeply moved by Rubens than by Caravaggio because Rubens substitutes an element of artificiality for the naked realism and truthfulness of Caravaggio, and also because Stella is fundamentally most drawn to art that is capable of being developed further by others, rather than to art of total accomplishment or final realization. But he also accepts that the artificiality of Rubens is the result of the fact that he was to a large extent making painting out of and about other painting, a romantic attitude which makes him in certain respects more relevant to subsequent painting; and "Rubens could be our perfect teacher." (I myself feel that some of today's figurative painters would do better to stick to Caravaggio, or better still go back to Giotto.)

Although the theme of the origins, development and present dilemma of abstract art and the way in which it might be enriched by consulting the past runs throughout the six chapters of this book, the first half is directed further backwards in time, while the second half concentrates more upon the art of this century. The third chapter, on Annibale Carracci, really uses his work to throw into relief the achievements of Caravaggio and Rubens, by showing how much more open and inventive they were in consulting the work of their predecessors and mentors. The fourth chapter, entitled "Picasso", is just as much about the origins of abstraction as about Picasso's art. Stella admires Picasso not least for his ability to pillage the art of the past; and it is indicative of Stella's ambitions that he realizes that if con-

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John Golding



temporary abstraction is ever to achieve the greatness he wants for it, it must face the challenge of the magnitude of Picasso's achievement. He quite rightly sees Picasso's neo-classical phase of the 1920s as a turning-point in his art, although Picasso never turned his back on Cubism even temporarily, as Stella suggests, and of course it informed all his subsequent art. Stella recognizes that the Cubists used or depicted space in a new and original way, but he also feels that Cubist painting ultimately flattened out the space available to painting and that the exciting spatial possibilities are still to be exploited and explored. His view of Cubism is somewhat blinkered because he approaches it, quite understandably, from the point of view of abstraction, from which in fact it always fought shy. At the same time, he recognizes that much of Picasso's subsequent work has the spatial thrust and vitality which can only be engendered by strongly volumetric forms forcefully and imaginatively manipulated and deployed. All great figurative painting has been reinforced by abstract, purely pictorial concerns but Picasso's work raises the question whether abstraction, always (if at times unwillingly) to a certain extent linked to representation, can function at full force without it. "Can we get along with half the recipe?" Stella clearly believes we can, but only by competing with the richness of representational art's spatial repertoire. What he most deplores is "the albatross" of semi-abstraction, which was "a reality in 1920" (surely at least a decade earlier than this?) and "is still flourishing in the 1980s".

Stella venerates the early achievements of the great pioneering abstractionists, Mondrian, Malevich and Kandinsky, but no one of them passes through his scrutiny with colours quite at high mast. I think he is least good on Mondrian. He sees Mondrian as deriving from Impressionism and "its surface concerns, color, light and rhythm". In fact the Symbolist background, filtered through the rigours of an analytic Cubist syntax, is more significant for an understanding of Mondrian; and it is simply not true to say that "Surrender to sensation is the secret of Mondrian's success" and that "Pure color is the beginning of Mondrian's sensationalism".

Far from surrendering to sensation, Mondrian dominated and suppressed it, and colour was for him an intellectual and symbolic abstraction. Stella recognizes but ultimately fails to appreciate the element of distillation that gave early abstraction its power; and it is this same distillation that has subsequently also informed many of the most moving and spiritually rich products of abstraction. He seems to find Malevich's "breakthrough" pictures a little too schematic and arid, but he clearly responds to the element of quirkiness in Malevich's art and, I suspect, to his capacity to go to extremes. Certain reservations are expressed about Kandinsky's first abstract phase because the paint quality is too superficially seductive and not "pushed" sufficiently hard. But we have only to look at Stella's own recent work to know that Kandinsky is ultimately to be awarded the palm; and already his early abstraction has an openness that gives us "a bright expanding vision which in turn gives us hope that we can revive our dulled surfaces".

If many of Stella's comments on twentieth-century art are touched by asperity, it is equally characteristic of him that he should take an original and positive view of the later works of these prophets of abstraction, works which have on the whole attracted less critical attention. He sees the bars and grids of Mondrian's pictures as becoming increasingly free from the surfaces which they at first sight appear to define and constrict; they span the surface rather than cutting it and dividing it. And when we see them in this light they become infinitely extendable and the spaces around and behind them begin in turn to expand and float. "It is here that abstraction is truly born again. . . . With help like this anything is possible." The best of Malevich's later, figurative work he sees as somehow optimistic, suggesting perhaps that if Malevich had recaptured his earlier visionary fervour, the products of a second phase of abstraction might have been even richer than those of his first. Kandinsky's later, harder, more difficult and convoluted work, Stella clearly sees as a storehouse of unexploited riches, largely because it is so full

of movement that creates or suggests space; if much of this movement has about it a diagrammatic quality this is because Kandinsky has felt the need to try to render volumetric passages in space without the recourse to recognizable imagery. "Instead of using his easel to prop up a window on the world, Kandinsky uses it as a windshield moving through the universe."

Stella makes the point that for many American painters abstract art really began in the 1940s. Understandably enough, as he homes in on the art of his immediate predecessors his judgments at times become somewhat personal. The attempt, for example, to relate Barnett Newman, who was more than any other artist a father figure for Stella, to Kandinsky, whose work finds resonances in Stella's own recent work, is not altogether convincing; and it seems to me that as artists they have very little in common. Kandinsky's example is perhaps more relevant for Morris Louis, "nearly the



Malevich's "Girls in the Field" is reproduced from Frank Stella's Working Space, which is reviewed on this page.

last abstract painter to hint at the potential that abstraction might have for creating a full and expansive space like that of Rubens". He is sparing in his comments about his own contemporaries although he clearly has an affection for certain early Nolands and sees some of the rot as setting in with Olitski's bland acrylic fields. I hope he is keeping a journal; it would be worth waiting for.

Stella sees de Kooning and above all Pollock as having reintroduced into painting a sense of energy and freedom which both Impressionism and Cubism lacked. He recognizes that Pollock's greatest achievement lay in the "overall" drip paintings and he finds parallels between their interacting skeins of paint and Mondrian's grids; their relationship to the edges of the painting is deliberately ambiguous – sometimes they seem to bind the painting to its format, at others they float up from it liberating the space between and behind. But by implication at least Stella finds that the Cubist heritage inhibits these works and, once again, he is most excited by their potential: "To go anywhere with the thin paint skeins that Pollock activated we have to give them more movement and definition." Also, despite their extraordinary originality, indeed because of it, in these works Pollock destroys his own sources and contact with the past, leaving himself and other artists as it were stranded. Still, whatever the path forward may be, abstraction will have to acknowledge Pollock's achievement if only because the relationship of his dripped configurations to the surface which supports them "seeks to define the working space of abstract painting".

Stella has many interesting things to say about the question of scale (as for example when he writes that it was the elimination of the palette and not of the easel that changed the face of so much painting). "The size of what one dips the brush into counts for more than the size of what one paints on." But I wish he had said still more, and he fails to make the

point that despite the effectiveness of the way in which Newman's "zips" or vertical flairs successfully activate the surfaces of his paintings, simultaneously binding and pushing apart the monolithic coloured surfaces to their sides, ultimately it was the sheer scale on which Newman worked that defied a single viewpoint or a single reading of his pictures. And if Newman and his great contemporaries of the 1940s and 50s gave other painters some of the "working space" for which Stella longs, they also to a certain extent deprived much subsequent painting of a physical space in which to live. I wonder how many hundreds of thousands of vast paintings have been destroyed or are lying rolled up and neglected in studios, barns and attics across the world, and in particular the English-speaking world. I wonder, too, if the problem of an ultimate destination is not at least partly responsible for the desperation and lassitude that characterizes so much of today's large-scale abstraction.

tant because in it Stella tells us something about his own work and how he views it. In these closing pages Stella reaffirms his enjoyment of the great abstractions of Kandinsky, Mondrian and Malevich.

but I do have trouble with their dicta, their pleading their impassioned defence of abstraction. My feeling is that these reasons, these theoretical underpinnings of theology and antimaterialism, have done abstract painting a disservice which has contributed to its present-day plight.

While Stella is so alive, to and so good on, the art of the past which excites him, this statement shows a startling lack of historical sense, for of course without their intellectual and ideological convictions these artists, his artistic grandparents, could never have achieved their ends. His own painting he sees as a mixture of tough, pragmatic empiricism, what he calls "acquired New England experience" and "half unconsciously held Mediterranean gift". Clearly the six months spent in Rome (from September 1982 to June 1983) marked an intellectual watershed for him. Renaissance painting, which had earlier seemed alien and threatening, became increasingly a challenge and an inspiration.

When Stella turns his attention to iconography he can be brilliant (as, for example, in his analysis of Titian's "Flaying of Marsyas"), but for the most part content in art is for him subsidiary consideration: or, to put it differently, content is something he often chooses to ignore. He makes the point that "access to abstraction to anyone born after 1936 (the year of his own birth) is direct and unencumbered". He believes that if abstraction is sufficiently good, sufficiently vital, it justifies itself by its appearance and presence, and there are few of us who would quarrel with that. But the last remains that if abstraction has been with us as a central part of artistic life for three quarters of a century, artists of Stella's generation were the first who didn't have to work their way into abstraction and who hence often didn't know what their art was about. This doesn't trouble Stella: his art is about art, about life seen through art (there is a passage, for example, about how he could only see the New York environment through recent painting), and latterly very much about space. But countless abstract artists of his own and a subsequent generation have been consumed by doubts and hesitations because they have come to feel that art about art is not sufficiently self-sustaining; their gestures have become artificial or mechanical and their working spaces those of too many routine and not of the mind and spirit. To modify it is not, as Stella suggests, simply a question of looking or waiting for something to regenerate it.

Stella concludes that abstraction has its roots in a northern, realist landscape tradition – a view which has frequently been advanced. Although he deals throughout with major issues, he also for the most part elucidates them by reference to individual works of art, and here he trots out Paulus Potter's "The Young Bull", and this simply won't do, it is fine, touching and truthful painting but does not support the weight of his arguments. Stella's generalizations are often contentious, generally illuminating and unfailingly stimulating. However, when he writes "by prizeing Peter over Caravaggio, Mondrian, Kandinsky and Malevich finally put nineteenth-century French painting and its source, Italian Renaissance painting, to rest", one can see what he is trying to say and admire him for the bravery of the way in which he puts it; but he also comes for the first and only time perilously close to sounding foolish. He would have been better advised to choose one of the great myths of visionary masterpieces in which Northern art abounds; better still, he could have addressed himself to the position Courbet occupied in the history of modernism.

The publication of *Working Space* coincides with that of the first of a multi-volume catalogue raisonné of Stella's work by Lawrence Rubin, with a thoughtful, beautifully illustrated preface by Robert Rosenblum, which puts his early and formidable achievement into the historical perspective. This volume covers the years 1958 to 1965. It leaves him, at the age of thirty-nine, already unquestionably a

## Change and challenge

On the eve of Margaret Thatcher's visit to Moscow, Archie Brown takes an optimistic view of current political developments in Russia.

**TIMOTHY J. COLTON**  
The Dilemma of Reform in the Soviet Union  
(Revised edition)  
273pp. New York: Council on Foreign Relations. Paperback, \$6.95.  
0876090145  
**JERRY F. HOUGH**  
The Struggle for the Third World: Soviet Debates and American Options  
293pp. Washington, DC: Brookings Institution. \$32.95 (paperback, \$12.95).  
0815737467  
**ION RATTU**  
Moscow Challenges the World  
410pp. Sherwood Press. £12.50.  
0907671235

The Western image of a monolithic and unchanging Soviet system dies hard. But those who wish to sustain such a view find themselves in some difficulty today. It is clear that there has been a great deal of policy innovation during Mikhail Gorbachev's first two years as Soviet leader, that political argument is being conducted in Soviet publications and that a political struggle is taking place within the Communist Party. To dismiss such change as no more than cosmetic is absurd, and to view it as a mere shift of tactics on the part of a united Soviet establishment is a crucial misunderstanding.

A number of Soviet dissidents now in emigration have adopted such a position (though it is not the standpoint of Academician Andrei Sakharov, who, while accepting that there is much in the system which remains morally repugnant, also holds that there have been a number of changes for the better). But from a more detached perspective than that of former Soviet citizens who have spent years locked in conflict with the authorities in the Soviet Union, it can seem unhelpful to dismiss as trivial all political change short of the institutionalization of overt dissent and opposition – in effect, instant acceptance of political pluralism in a country with a strongly authoritarian political culture. Political cultures are not immutable, but changes in the values and fundamental political beliefs which are among their components do not keep pace with every policy innovation.

One reason why current changes in the

Soviet Union are being greeted with scepticism – even incredulity – by former dissidents now living abroad is that the present reforms have come not through their efforts, but from an understanding of politics as the art of the possible by individuals and informal groups attempting to widen the boundaries of the system, rather than destroy them. The odds against the success of more revolutionary change were so long that the most likely outcome would have been the destruction of the reformers' political influence. While many of the dissidents had good moral or artistic reasons for acting as they did, it is not they who are in the forefront of the reform movement today. The people in the lead are those who in Brezhnev's time said as much as was possible within officially-sanctioned publications, but accepted a measure of self-censorship, as well as of external censorship, in order to survive and play a role in influencing policy once a leadership change had brought about a shift in the "correlation of forces" within the Soviet political system.

Though the Brezhnev era was a highly conservative one in terms of domestic policy, it was not so devoid of new ideas or of debate as is often assumed in the West. Documents which appeared in *samizdat* received a good deal of attention from Western journalists as well as from the KGB, but books published in small editions, and articles appearing in specialist journals, were noticed only by a handful of academic observers. Yet some of the ideas which are surfacing now in the Soviet mass media had already been expressed – in more careful, sometimes even Aesopian language – years earlier.

The pace of change under Gorbachev has been such that – in contrast with the Brezhnev era – many of the most radical writings are now to be found in the pages of newspapers and weeklies, rather than in books or academic journals where the longer time-lag between writing and publication means that the limits of the possible have moved on before such works become available. Nevertheless, 1987 is likely to see the appearance of some remarkable novels, political and economic analyses and journal articles, for the movement quickened in 1986. Some of the personnel changes – such as the appointment of new editors of various periodicals, a new head of the Culture Department of the Central Committee and a new

Minister of Culture – led not only to more innovative and interesting work being written but also to the dusting-down of manuscripts which had long been denied publication.

The fact that very far-reaching political as well as economic reform can emanate from within the party in a Communist system has already been demonstrated in countries other than the Soviet Union. Political change can occur in a variety of ways. There is a world of difference between the way in which the changes of 1980–81 were brought about in Poland and the sources of, and manner of introducing, the reforms of 1968 in Czechoslovakia. There was, however, some similarity in what



resulted – a measure of political pluralism, albeit still limited, in both countries. Since both the political culture and the balance of political forces are very different in the Soviet Union from those of Czechoslovakia and Poland, it would be wrong to expect to see in the near future in Russia anything as radical as took place in those two East-Central European societies. But those who take pride in the gradualism of political change in Britain – where, as we know, old names and concepts are frequently retained while the nature of the institutions and the character of the policies to which they refer undergo profound changes – should not apply a totally different criterion in their assessment of change within the Soviet Union. Fortunately, there is a growing literature which delves behind Soviet façades and West-

ern (including émigré) stereotypes, and makes a significant contribution to our understanding of the workings and the dynamics of Soviet politics. The latest books by two of the West's leading specialists on the Soviet Union are cases in point. Timothy Colton's *The Dilemma of Reform in the Soviet Union* (first published in 1984 and now extensively revised and enlarged) tackles head-on the question of the sources of pressure for reform, and the nature of any change which may be expected in the short term. He details the numerous failures of the unreformed Soviet system, especially in the economic sphere, and notes the jolt which Solidarity and events in Poland in 1980–81 gave to the Soviet establishment. For many party intellectuals in the Soviet Union, and perhaps for Gorbachev himself, it was a stark reminder that Communist systems are not immune from political crises, and that workers' support for (or even passive acquiescence in) the status quo cannot be taken for granted.

Colton pays attention to the variety of views to be found in official Soviet publications and within the higher echelons of the Communist Party itself, and sees moderate reform as the most likely outcome of current developments. He suggests that what we are going to witness is "significant reform within the Soviet system but not a fundamental reform of it". In Colton's view, the most instructive comparisons are with the recent past rather than "with our idealized vision of how a government should behave", and he holds that the contrast between Mikhail Gorbachev and Leonid Brezhnev is more interesting than the differences between Gorbachev and Thomas Jefferson.

Jerry Hough's *The Struggle for the Third World* is an extended discussion of esoteric Soviet debates on such issues as the patterns of historical development, Western investment, revolutionary strategy and the nature of political systems in the Third World. Though he examines this body of Soviet writing over a long period – from Stalin to Gorbachev – most of the works he cites were published in the Brezhnev era. They illustrate yet again that, contrary to the images projected by the Western mass media in those years, the Soviet political class was not divided between a handful of dissidents with new ideas and a "lumpen-intelligentsia" of like-minded automatons. Of course, there were many time-serving conformists, but there were also those who were quietly revising outmoded theories and generating new concepts while working within the parameters of the system. Some quite striking differences of opinion were expressed in print

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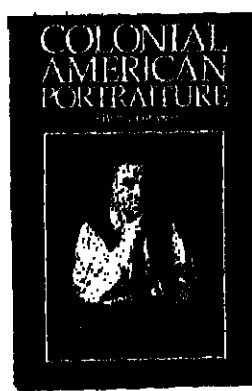
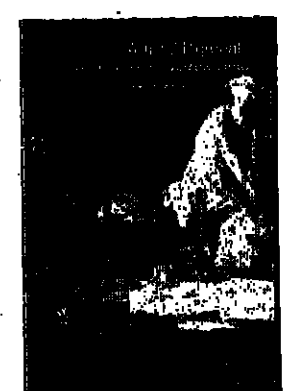
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on many subjects by people who tried to influence policy outcomes while (or rather, by) adhering to the rules of the game which, as Hough notes, are complex and "vary from time to time and from issue to issue".

As a result of changes in Soviet thinking which have been taking place at the level of specialist debates and which in recent years have increasingly seeped into the minds of policy-makers, Hough suggests that practically no one in the Soviet Union believes any more that radical revolutions in Third World countries will lead to Soviet-style socialism. Indeed, he adds, "most Soviet scholars are so eager for major reform of the Soviet economic system that they do not even advise third world countries to adopt it". Many ideological assumptions have been discarded in the light of the experience of the past quarter of a century, and also of the more serious Soviet study of the outside world which is, in part, a product of various policy-oriented regional institutes established in the 1950s and 60s.

But while a number of the present discussions had their more cautious forerunners, the

extent to which debates in many areas of Soviet political life have become more open under Gorbachev should not be underestimated. As Gorbachev's power base has been strengthened over the past two years, more people with different outlooks from their predecessors have moved into positions in which they can influence policy and the terms of the debate. The "moderate reform" envisaged by Gorbachev, writing in 1986, is already under way. A point will come at which Gorbachev and the by-now means fully united Soviet leadership will have to decide between going beyond this to the implementation of more radical reform, and drawing back.

The outcome is uncertain, for, as Gorbachev himself has observed on a number of occasions, a political struggle is going on in the Soviet Union – and not on the fringes of society but within every major institution. Argument is taking place within that very Marxism-Leninism which is so often portrayed – both in vulgar Soviet and crude anti-Soviet propaganda – as an unchanging body of doctrine. Debate is being conducted on such fundamental issues as the nature of socialist democracy, the

place of competitive elections within the Soviet system, the role of markets under socialism, the limitations of central planning and the need for a more fundamental break with outmoded concepts and stereotypes on the part of Soviet social scientists.

None of this amounts to the institutionalization of pluralist democracy, but it is a far cry already from the more cautious and circumspect discussions of the Brezhnev era, let alone from the appalling Stalin years. It is a pity, therefore, that Ion Ratiu's book, *Moscow Challenges the World*, which was written between 1946 and 1950 but at that time failed to find a publisher, should be presented now to a Western readership (not least by Brian Crozier in his introduction) as being as relevant today to Western leaders and publics as when it was composed. Many of the points made by Ratiu are perceptive and worth publishing even now, but there are also sweeping generalizations about Russian history which were highly dubious even in 1950, and many more points which, hardly surprisingly, have been overtaken by events. Much of what Ratiu, a Romanian emigrant, has to say about Stalin's Russia is

valid. But the book is hardly a tract for our times. Westerners who wish to understand developments within the Soviet Union do not need more oversimplified accounts of what "Moscow" thinks, of the inherent nature of "Russian Marxism" or the monolithic character of "Marxism-Leninism", but an appreciation that even the appearance of unanimity within the Soviet establishment long cultivated is now being cast aside, that there are many conflicting ideas to be found even within official "Moscow", and that "Marxism" and "Marxism-Leninism", while they provide a language and framework for Soviet political discourse, are much more elastic and subject to evolutionary change than most people supposed during Stalin's last years.

The differences between some of the people within the Communist Party of the Soviet Union are no less great than those which separate members of the major political parties in Britain, even though the day is still some way off when they can be so openly expressed. Of them, more appositely than of the British and the Americans, it can be said that they are divided by their common language.

## The primacy of Brother Colonel

John Wright

JONATHAN BEARMAN  
*Qaddafi's Libya*  
298pp. Zed. £18.95 (paperback, £6.95), 0862324335  
DAVID BLUNDY and ANDREW LYCETT  
*Qaddafi and the Libyan revolution*  
220pp. Weidenfeld and Nicolson. £12.95, 0297789244

During the seventeen years of Muammar Qaddafi's revolution, his extraordinary personality and ideas have so dominated Libyan affairs that this not very important country is now more widely known than at the time when it was a Second World War battlefield. If Colonel Qaddafi appears bizarre to outsiders, difficult to predict and understand, he does not necessarily seem so to fellow-countrymen whose basic character he shares. Not only Western foreigners but other Arabs too are often puzzled by the Libyan character. Even before the Qaddafi revolution, the Western visitor to Libya could encounter Moroccans, Tunisians, Egyptians and other "Arab brothers" apologizing, "We don't understand these people either". And it is not easy for outside observers to analyse a country with a traditionally closed and introverted society that has, if anything, become more secretive in recent years.

Officially, Qaddafi is not even head of the Libyan state, since all power was in theory transferred to the people ten years ago. "Brother Colonel", as Qaddafi likes to be known in recognition of his closeness to the masses, is "thinker-leader" of the revolution, but is otherwise supposed to be a private citizen. Nevertheless, his political thinking and leadership continue to dominate domestic and foreign policies; and his slogans and giant portraits in many glamorous guises dominate the Libyan urban landscape. His primacy is fully recognized in both *Qaddafi's Libya* and *Qaddafi and the Libyan Revolution*. Both books are accounts of the rise of the modern Libyan state, inevitably interwoven with Qaddafi's career and ideology.

Qaddafi was born in the middle of the Second World War, just as Italian Libya was being taken over by the British Military Administration, which continued to govern until the United Nations-sponsored independence in 1951. An understanding of the Italian period in Libya (including the Italian role during the independent kingdom) is important because of its many influences on subsequent events and attitudes, but Jonathan Bearman's account is disappointing, being apparently based on only a cursory reading of the excellent sources available. And there is, throughout his book, little feeling for the peculiar flavour of Libya, while in the chapter devoted to the conflict in Chad there is no convincing explanation of Libyan intervention there. Bearman is much better on social change in Libya since independence. He has a particularly good section on internal migration and the associated difficulties which

occurred when the country was still a kingdom, and he is excellent on the transformation of an almost purely pastoral-rural society into an urban consumer society, which was largely completed within the space of one generation. In describing the evolution of Libyan society and the attempts at "revolutionary mobilisation" of a deeply conservative and politically innocent people, Bearman succeeds – without acting as an apologist for the régime – in straightening out the record of Qaddafi's achievements. These have often been misunderstood and misrepresented by less observant or well-informed Western reporters. Herein lies the chief value of his book. The colonel is often falsely labelled a religious fundamentalist, whereas Bearman believes his objectives have much more in common with Kemal Atatürk's secularization of Turkey.

David Blundy and Andrew Lycett's *Qaddafi and the Libyan Revolution* shows signs of haste; the geographical and historical background are not always reliable. One of the book's main contributions lies in its character-sketches of the colonel, the vignettes of his life-style, the anecdotes of his meetings with, and reactions to, other people. Of the twenty-four columns of index, over three are taken up with Qaddafi, while Libya itself earns only a little over one column.

We are told about the layout of the leader's private quarters at the Bab Azizia Barracks in Tripoli, the bedroom where the Pierre Cardin

pyjamas hang from a hook, the rooms permeated by the odour of his favourite Givenchy cologne. Here is Qaddafi relaxing by lying on the floor of his office with a sheet over his body and face, sometimes for hours on end. We learn of his habit of propositioning women journalists sent to interview him.

Then there are the clothes, which correspond to Qaddafi's moods and to the need to establish different identities for different occasions: Qaddafi in white uniform trimmed with gold to impress his Tunisian hosts in 1983; defiantly nationalistic in traditional Libyan baraccas in London in the 1960s; in "red, high-necked shirt and flowing black and white robes" at last year's non-aligned summit in Harare, where he "looked like an ageing star taking the stage at a Las Vegas night club". Ageing star or not, he gave the assembled delegates a diatribe on the shortcomings of their movement that was vintage Qaddafi.

More seriously enlightening are the pages on Qaddafi's career as an officer-cadet. Despite the fact that he already had a substantial record with the police and security services as a political agitator, he was allowed to enlist in the royalist army. And he had, in fact, joined it with the deliberate intention of using it to overthrow the monarchy. British advisers with the army who knew Qaddafi in the 1960s are cited as sources for his accounts of behaviour as a cadet. The character that emerges from these accounts is almost wholly unattractive; he was

considered a poor soldier, a failure at exams, rude, undisciplined and a troublemaker. Although the Libyans and the British apparently knew much about Qaddafi's plans and preparations for revolution by the mid-1960s, no effective action was taken. The authors quote one of their British informants as admitting, "He must have slipped through the net."

Clearly, this is not the first time Qaddafi has owed his survival to the ineptitude of others. Discussing last year's United States-Libya crisis, Blundy and Lycett point out that there is often no such thing as an American policy towards Libya. Instead, there exists a battleground of conflicting views between different agencies and between departments of the same agency. The CIA was divided on the question of Libyan association with terrorism, but the mainstream analysts on the Libya desk recommended that the best policy towards Qaddafi was to ignore him unless he seriously increased his terrorist involvement. The advice was ignored; possibly because it has never been easy to ignore Qaddafi himself.

In the 1980s alone, Qaddafi has survived several assassination attempts, army mutinies and one bombing raid by the United States. Still only in his mid-forties, he might well sit in power for another thirty years. But by that time the oil that allows him to play his independent and provocative domestic and international roles will probably have run out.

and their sympathizers' cult of Stalin and yearning for Russia, to the shattering revelations of the Twentieth Party Congress of 1956.

Both the youthful Calvino and the still young Pavese come over as very engaging personalities. Readers of these authors' work who are unaware of their background may be surprised to find that Calvino was by far the more politically committed. For all his sense of humour and enjoyment of life – Spriano quotes a dithyramb that he wrote for *L'Unità* in 1948, on the "admirable rhythm of full curves and long limbs" of Silvana Mangano's body – Calvino, who had fought in the partisan army, was an active member of the PCI, and one of the very few intellectuals of the time who sought real contact with the working class. When he left the party in 1956 his resignation was accorded – like Antonio Gollitri's – the rare honour of being officially "accepted". Pavese, a generous friend to younger writers, was personally indifferent to politics. His diary, which was published in 1952, two years after his suicide, kindled a curious controversy between Massimo Mila, who saw it as evidence of Pavese's private, all-consuming passions, and the official Party line, according to which his death had been brought about by the writer's disgust with capitalist society.

Despite Spriano's equanimity, Togliatti seems to have been a far less likeable character. The founder of the PCI was of course a

scholar, and a fastidious writer of prose, who found time to reply to letters in longhand and in green ink. But despite his readiness to answer all questions with subtle arguments, he was never prepared either to accept, or to express, any criticism of what he considered the continuity of Marxist ideology, from Lenin to Stalin. The eventual evolution of the PCI towards an increasing independence from Moscow would prove him wrong in the long run. But as Spriano reminds us, the hostility between right and left was infinitely harsher and more ruthless in post-war Italy than it is now. The Christian Democrats in power did all they could to undermine their adversaries. For example, in order to frustrate Italian participation in the 1952 Communist-inspired Vienna International Peace Conference, Mario Scelba, then Minister for Internal Affairs, simply cancelled all visas for Austria. Like others, Spriano got over that problem by travelling to Switzerland; on his return his passport was seized for two years.

It is hard now to realize the importance that certain beliefs had at the time. Franco Barbato, a well known liberal journalist, now a reporter for *La Stampa*, once told Professor Spriano that, when waiting to be executed by the Nazis in Yugoslavia, he spent all night trying to devise a suitable sentence to yell at the firing squad. When morning came he had thought of nothing better than "Viva Stalin!"

## Pure as a peach

D. J. Enright

ADAM ZAGAJEWSKI  
Tremor: Selected poems  
Translated by Renata Gortyczynski  
83pp. Collins Harvill. £6.95.  
000271910 X

Referring to the early writing of Adam Zagajewski (Polish, born in 1945, resident in Paris since 1981), Czesław Miłosz remarks in his brief but weighty preface that the poetry of political commitment is "noble-minded, but often one-dimensional". The trouble with such poetry is that its message might as well be couched in prose, generally has been already, and, since the poetry soon vanishes out of the window, still is. However self-soothing for a while, protest poetry is rarely more productive than muttering into one's pillow in the dead of night. And yet, nothing should be alien to this most human of the arts, and it would be an odd poet, one of suspiciously iron control, who never touched on public events, on contemporary distresses and disgraces.

Zagajewski, Miłosz continues, has abandoned the poetry of political engagement in favour of a meditation on the flow of time which brings together the historical and the metaphysical. The world thus created or recreated is not a place of escape, but "on the contrary, it is related in a peculiar way to the crude reality of our century". As inferred, Zagajewski's views on the world are unexceptional, and – in half of the world – unexceptionable. Once again, it is a case of what was fairly often thought but never expressed in quite this idiosyncratic way.

He proceeds by captivating indirection, by slipping in allusions and images which are apparently incidental and free of affect. An intermittently comic poem, "Franz Schubert: A Press Conference", has the composer telling how he was chased "by the strangeness of style itself; no, not the police"; an address to Madam Death (a feminine noun in Polish) ends with a mention of "the sleepy complaints of the poor poets / whose passports you didn't renew"; a poem involving Cyprian Norwid, the nineteenth-century Polish poet and hater of jargon of any complexion, asks "is that the way / the new epoch begins, is this tank / with a long Gogolian nose its godfather . . . ?" And elsewhere, among character actors acting their characters, old people impersonating old people, the sick playing the sick, and so forth, the only example out of step is oppressors pretending they are oppressed.

Zagajewski was born in Lvov, now in the Soviet Ukraine. In "To Go to Lvov", after memories or reconstructions of the city, the poet says: "There was too much of Lvov, and

now / there isn't any"; it has been scissored out or pruned, as if by gardeners, tailors or censors. And yet you can go there every day, "after all / it exists, quiet and pure as / a peach. It is everywhere". We can see how the celebratory nature of the poetry, celebration against the odds, must recommend it to Miłosz. "Kierkegaard on Hegel" – Zagajewski studied philosophy in Cracow – reflects that, since the glorious states (body politic? way of life?) we were promised have been shelved, for the time being we had better enjoy

a cramped cell in the jailhouse, a prisoner's song, the good mood of a customs officer, the fist of a cop,

for those who don't find shelter in the huge will look to the small.

This sounds like resignation, but resignation of a positive and open kind, remote from giving up. Even honourable opinions can prove accursed. In time the rebels become barely distinguishable from what they were rebelling against, and humanity sickens under the frost of stalemate. What poets can do is show that, however detestable the régime, life must still have its attractions and the world retain its beauty, since if these have truly departed, what likelihood is there that they will reappear? If they are feeble enough to be nullified or re-

pealed, are they worth having at all?

The poet as guardian is manifest in the richness of "In the Trees", where so much is happening, including a woodpecker who "cables / an urgent report on the capture of / Carthage and on the Boston Tea Party"; and in "Ode to Plurality", with its proliferating contradictions:

Who once lived won't  
forget the changing delight of seasons,  
he will dream even of nettles and burdocks, and the  
spiders in his dream won't look any worse  
than swallows.

And most explicitly in a very Miłoszian piece, "In the Past": the dawn and the milkman, running through the snow, make tiny pools of water –

A small bird  
drinks that water and it sings and once more  
it saves the disorder of things and you and me  
and the singing.

The (first) impression here is commonly one of inconsequence. The verse is characterized by a jerky, disjointed procedure, as if a species of cataloguing were under way, and its rhythms are no more distinct than those present in well-written prose. I suspect that in this the translation reflects the original. For the seeming dislocations are offset by – in fact, are seen to be in

## Clutching at Culture

That same purr-voiced disc jockey  
has been too long among the toast today –  
we've had them all,  
a rave from the grave,  
a rumble in the tumbrell,  
a suture on the future –  
And breakfast used to be sanctuary  
after the draught of dreams  
and before the shop-front terror.  
My daughter has gone out to work  
and left me with the cat.  
I look above my head  
to the hardboard pinned with family snaps.  
There she is, dressed in a tabard  
with braided edges, holding tight the hand  
of someone safe. A seraph  
of the dangerous world, it seems  
she's one step only from omnipotence,  
as if she said with her unfailing smile,  
Now is the ending of the world  
and now goes on forever.

PETER PORTER

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John Wright



## Creative tensions

John Drury

HORTON DAVIES  
Like Angels from a Cloud: The English metaphysical preachers 1588-1645  
503pp. San Marino, CA: Huntington Library.  
\$38.  
0873280881

Izaak Walton said that John Donne preached "like an angel from a cloud, but in none". The airiness of the simile has never been very apt to the dense concreteness and insatiable passion that distinguish Donne's sermons. Horton Davies has, however, adapted it into the plural to make the title of his book *Like Angels from a Cloud: The English metaphysical preachers 1588-1645*. It does not suit Donne's contemporaries much better than it does himself, whether it is Archbishop James Ussher describing the physical torment of crucifixion, or Lancelot Andrewes exploring paradox in clipped, workmanlike phrases. Unfortunately it does suit this long book, whose wanderings in quest of pretty and "intriguing" (Professor Davies's favourite adjective) passages, which are often duplicated and usually set in sketchy biographies, accumulate into an enervating vagueness dramatically inappropriate to its subject-matter. This is depressing, because the subject is so rich and so important, and the author is obviously enjoying himself with his jokes—of which the most excruciating is calling John King, father of Henry, "the Prince of Walls".

According to its publishers "this is the very first study made in depth of over forty Anglican preachers in the Golden Age of the English Pulpit". This is doubly false: the study lacks depth and is not the first. Fraser Mitchell published *English Pulpit Oratory from Andrewes to Tillotson* in 1931. It is a very impressive work of literary history, done in long perspective and social depth: no cloudy drifting, but detailed investigation of the complex nexus of speaking and writing which were the context of

seventeenth-century preaching. Mitchell dealt with most of the same men as Horton Davies (and some later preachers) and put them in the long rhetorical tradition which ran from classical antiquity to the beginning of the eighteenth century. He had the learning to do it, and to fasten it to its groundwork in education and the practicalities of writing and publishing. Although his work was produced over fifty-five years ago, it manages the sort of deeply sculpted reconstruction of a literary past which compares well with the achievements of contemporary historians like Robert Darnton. Davies cites Mitchell and justly calls his work admirable, but twice rebukes him for referring to "Anglo-Catholic" preachers—surely a venial anachronism.

Reading Davies on Donne's pulpit masterpieces makes one long, not only for the solid sustenance in the earlier book, but also for the sprightliness of John Carey's recent *John Donne: Life, mind and art* (reviewed in the TLS, June 12, 1981); particularly in the context of Donne's difficulties with the general resurrection of dead bodies at doomsday, the reassembly of amputated soldiers and of sailors eaten by fish that were in turn eaten by people. There is a Voltairian hilarity about Carey which, while it falls short of sympathy with Donne's Christianity somewhat remorselessly, does uncover the mounting strain on that Christianity "in a brief interval when reason as an instrument for reaching God had been fatally discredited, and reason as the key to nature was still so untried that it could be dismissed out of hand, as Donne dismisses it". Donne stood in a time when the preacher could deploy the entire apparatus of Christian mythology, still common and vital coin, still doctrine felt as fact, though new philosophy was beginning to cast all in doubt. But only

just. And the *tour de force* of Donne's rhetoric are exciting because they just manage to hold it all together and derive psychological penetration from the strain. Beneath the grotesquerie was the unease, even pathos, of an impending crisis. The preachers of the next generation would turn to more modest projects, the Cambridge Platonists leading the way. As a guide into the investigation of this momentous transition Fraser Mitchell holds the field, not Horton Davies.



*Silex Scintillans*:  
SILEX SCINTILLANS  
Henry Vaughan Silenus  
Thomas Vaughan's emblematic frontispiece to his twin brother Henry's *Silex Scintillans*.

## Passing it on

John Pitcher

JONATHAN GOLDBERG  
Voice Terminal Echo: Postmodernism and English Renaissance texts  
194pp. Methuen. £16 (paperback, £7.95).  
0416422004

The emphasis in Jonathan Goldberg's *Voice Terminal Echo* is on the varying ways in which literary messages pass from writer to writer in the English Renaissance. Between Spenser and Milton in *Aeropagica*, between Shakespeare and his later selves in *Titus Andronicus* and *Cymbeline*, and between everyone and Ovid in a continual exchange and rewriting of the rape and mutilation inflicted on the female body, hands and tongue in the *Metamorphoses*. As a disciple of Derrida and Lacan, Professor Goldberg is also interested in demythologizing the illusions of immediacy and human voice which inhabit modern and pre-modern readings of Herbert and Marvell. Who is speaking in their poems was the old question—but the new one for the post-moderns as Goldberg would have it, is *what* is speaking. In Marvell's "Nymph Complaining", rather than modulations in the young girl's voice, or states of experience which she recalls and repeats, Goldberg isolates the voice-text itself, the phenomenon "it", which, in its repetition (the number of instances and their iterability are cited) enters the poem, crossing its threshold into pure play and pleasure. A predictable corollary to this type of reading is Goldberg's own language throughout: the book. Aiming to deconstruct the critical voice itself, and its claims to property-rights over poems and plays, Goldberg offers sentences without verbs, or nouns, and sometimes without either.

All this makes for a difficult book to read, which is what Goldberg presumably wants (although not in the learned and packed notes, which are meticulous, shifty to the point of rudeness, and rather well shaped and grammatically exact). Whether the difficulty is worth struggling with will depend on a number of things. For those whom Goldberg himself calls "socially engaged" critics, these essays may appear to have lost all contact with historical reality (the reality which, in the case of *Aeropagica*, perhaps has less to do with re-

ceiving messages from *The Faerie Queene* than keeping the press free during wartime).

For other readers, even if they are impressed by Goldberg's dexterity in literary archaeology, anthropology and psychology (discovering, for example, the Medusa's head as one of the buried texts in *The Winter's Tale*), these pieces may still create another kind of unreality—a psychic one this time, where allusions, memory, trace, etymology *et al* are valorized to the same level as the primary texts. In Goldberg's most successful essay, on "October" in *The Shepherd's Calendar*, there is certainly some justification for this: other writers, and figures of writing, do flood into Spenser's present, into the space which the aspiring poet (in 1579) is unable yet to fill himself (and which Cuddie suggests ought to be topped up with drink). But Goldberg seems to regard the past as inundating all of the present, in all of these Renaissance writers, all of the time—as if there were no effective psychic defences, nor (for poets) tropes which, like sluice-gates, could make torrents into navigable water. It may be sentimental to say so, but for many people (even for writers, and even after Joyce) it is by not totalizing consciousness and dredging up every Freudian severed head, that they avoid going mad.

It is this madness and instability which Goldberg of course regards (no novelty here) as constituting the postmodern condition, and which he sees himself courageously embracing. His literary history, from Spenser to Marvell, is an achronological series of transgressions, the texts merely repeating their wounding of consciousness time after time. Reading *Voice Terminal Echo*, one cannot but compare it with another kind of literary history, Erich Auerbach's, in which the wound of experience heals into a scar, a mark of remembrance on Odysseus' thigh. For Auerbach, Homer's juxtaposition of times, and scenes of recognition, form one of the ways in which the West has represented to itself a complex and polyvalent reality: everything in the past can be represented as now, but only where there is fidelity and a torn limb made whole. Despite what Goldberg has offered here, in his aggressively scintillating manner, the case, in which Renaissance literature, for the restored body and healed, faithful mind (the case for *Cymbeline*, if not for *Titus Andronicus*) has still not been extinguished.

## Shoots of circumstance

Alan Rudrum

NOEL K. THOMAS  
Henry Vaughan: Poet of revelation  
196pp. Worthing: Churchman. £5.95.  
1850930422  
LOUIS L. MARTZ (Editor)  
George Herbert and Henry Vaughan  
569pp. Oxford University Press. £17.50  
(paperback, £6.95).  
0192541811

Noel K. Thomas argues in *Henry Vaughan: Poet of revelation* that Vaughan's critics have largely ignored two major influences: the tensions of Civil War and Commonwealth, and the Authorized Version of the Bible. This is probably a fair generalization. Detailed exploration of the relationship between Vaughan's characteristic expressions and themes and his immediate historical context is fairly new on the critical scene, existing perhaps in the samizdat of grant-application rather than in the journals. There has as yet been no full-scale critical attempt, like that of Chana Bloch's *Spelling the Word on Herbert* (reviewed in the TLS, February 28, 1986), to deal with biblical influence, but the editor of the Penguin/Yale Vaughan might quarrel with the contention that there has been no recognition of its scale.

Though he begins by taking issue with Vaughan's critics, Thomas refers very little to earlier work, probably to save the cost of footnotes. It is often unclear whether he disagrees with predecessors or is merely ignoring them.

Thomas's viewpoint on religio-political and biblical influence seems to me correct and, except in some minor details, one can agree with the readings which flow from it. Accounts of influences are liable to swamp critical readings; in avoiding this, Thomas has fallen into the opposite error. His account of relevant historical circumstance, lacking fineness of detail, is less suggestive and pointed than it might have been. In thinking about Vaughan's theme of the innocence of childhood, for example, and its relation to the concept of original sin, more explicit discussion of English Arminianism is warranted, if what we are about is examining the poems in relation to contemporary religio-political passions. In my view, a more thoroughgoing case can be made for the proposition that several of Vaughan's major poems are implicitly polemical, including those, perhaps especially those, that have been generally treated as if they were "timeless" religious lyrics. One weakness, common in Vaughan criticism, that Thomas does not entirely escape, is that "single vision" which used to have it, for example, that "Vaughan is the country of the mind" (and therefore all talk about landscape and sky in the *Usk Valley* is irrelevant). So here, the notion that Vaughan was "a solitary nature mystic who sought to escape from the world around him" is seen as incompatible with the new weight assigned to the influence of historical circumstance; while Thomas's sense of the importance of the Bible for Vaughan requires us to write off the influence of hermeticism as a mere distraction.

Thomas argues that despite his many borrowings, Vaughan is utterly different from Herbert, and that his reputation has been damaged by the constant comparison. The relationship between the two poets is sensitively dealt with in Louis L. Martz's introduction to his selection in the Oxford Authors series. The volume contains all Herbert's English poetry, together with *The Country Parson*; and both parts of Vaughan's *Silex Scintillans*, with a selection from his early secular poetry. In its paperback version this represents good value for undergraduate and general readers, though perhaps it would have resulted in greater coherence if some of Vaughan's prose had been included, and the secular poems omitted. Martz has provided useful notes, a guide to further reading, and a brief glossary of words which occur frequently with meanings that differ from modern use. I regret the omission of the bibliographies of Marilla and Simonides, and the inclusion of Friederich's elegiac on Twynne book—though its section on Vaughan's hermeticism, which reveals that the hermetic *libelli* were written by one Libellus, does deserve a certain kind of immortality.

## The tall and the true

John Bayley

TOMMASO LANDOLFI  
Words in Commotion and Other Stories  
Translated by Katherine Jason with an introduction by Italo Calvino  
275pp. Viking. £10.95.  
0670805181  
DANIEL HALPERN (Editor)  
The Art of the Tale: An international anthology of short stories 1945-1985  
816pp. Viking. £17.95.  
0670805920  
CLIFFORD FADIMAN (Editor)  
The World of the Short Story: A 20th-century collection  
874pp. Picador. £14.95.  
0330297171

Where the short story is concerned a naive but practical distinction might be made between the Tall Story, which is well invented but could never happen, and the Poetical or True Story, a spot in time which could occur any day of the week. Maupassant's "The Necklace" is a prime example of the first sort; Joyce's "The Dead", or Elizabeth Bowen's "Mysterious Kor", of the second. The two can of course be combined, and in some of the best examples they are, the "story" acting as a kind of lure to lead the reader into the more imponderable and mysterious *dominée* at the back of it.

Both types tend to become formulaic. Tall tales breed tall tales, and stories of the *New Yorker* genre follow an already middle-aged precedent in removing the "point", whose absence then becomes the story's focus and epiphany. The notion of "The Necklace" was developed by Somerset Maugham in two or three of his tales, and Henry James used it for his late and rather touching story, "Paste". "Paste" is unusual in exploring the nature of the three people concerned with the pearls: the dead wife, once an actress, who owned them; her son who refuses to believe his mother could ever have received a secret gift of great value; and the girl who is offered the seemingly worthless necklace but has scruples because she suspects it is genuine. Unusually for James his story depends in some degree on a bit of expertise he might have picked up from Kipling, and his "healer of sick pearls" in *Kim*. Pearls can look worthless until they are regularly worn by the right person.

Expertise is, of course, in place in the Tall Story. Maugham has a caddish young jeweller expert on a cruise liner who is challenged by her sneering husband to value the beads a young wife is wearing. He perceives that they are genuine, and precious, but at the same time realizes her terror lest he should disclose the fact. He elects to suffer the humiliation of admitting he was in error in first proclaiming their value. A Marxist critic might, not unreasonably, point out that these variations by three story-writers on the theme of value reveal much about the bourgeois society they are concerned with. But more interesting, perhaps, is the way in which the story's theme—at least in the case of Maugham and Maupassant—imposes a kind of duty on the character. The ordinary housewife of "The Necklace" has to behave like a stoical heroine in order to pay off the debt incurred by replacing the lost necklace. The young man in Maugham's story, "Mr Know-All", has to behave chivalrously at great loss of face to himself. They act like this not because it is in their nature but because the story commands it. As in Socialist Realism, the characters are created to serve the cause, or the plot.

In her introduction to her own stories, Elizabeth Bowen observed that the genre could not deal with character, and should not try. No doubt she was thinking of the way in which "the story in it", as James would say, controls the person in it. For her the story began in a sense of place, and then the author had to allot the right persons to be found there. The feeling of the place was involuntary and inspirational; but the actors had to be arranged and invented. None the less in her best stories, like "Mysterious Kor", the persons seem to have a complete life of their own, irrespective of their role as emanations of a moonlit night in wartime London. To impress us as a real masterpiece a story must have the same completeness in every part as any other successful work of art.

This is true of what might be called the best short story in the world—Chekhov's "The Lady with the Lapdog". Chekhov manages to fill all the parts of his story with their own particular truth, none of them at the expense of the others. After the mutual seduction of Anna and Gurov the division between them seems complete, expressed in the girl's sadness and tears and the man's quiet enjoyment of a water-melon, which he happens to find on the bedside table. It is a moment that might have been recorded, in their own way and for their own purposes, by Hemingway or Nabokov. Chekhov seems to be settling himself into his story, perhaps unconsciously, with the help of a sturdy Russian literary convention, going back through *Anna Karenina* to yet another Anna, the Donna Anna of Pushkin's miniature "investigative drama", *The Stone Guest*. Pushkin's Don Juan, full of amorous good will, is intrigued by Donna Anna's passive melancholy and grief after the act, as if the world had come to an end. This unresponsive woman has become his "fate", the one who will finally and involuntarily capture him, and with whom, indeed, he descends gladly into hell.

Chekhov's Gurov and Anna are each other's fate in a much milder and more humdrum sense. After the separateness that follows the seduction they come together in a quiet, com-

panionable way, sitting in the dawn on the sea-front and watching the waves break on the shore. When she has to leave the resort she leans out of the train window and looks at him one more time. Back in Moscow he slowly realizes what has happened to him. They meet again and continue to meet secretly, unknown to their respective spouses. They are in love. The story cannot help them or provide any solution: they seem to have fallen out of the story, into themselves and each other.

This arrest, only possible within the limits of the short story, makes "The Lady with the Lapdog" more moving than most long complete fictions, even than *Anna Karenina* itself. It also ignores the short story's usual technique of "making it strange", sharply emphasizing one aspect of things at the expense of others. Tommaso Landolfi was a master at this. A recluse, and a gambler who shunned publicity and literary contacts, he wrote stories out of what seems a kind of inverted exhibitionism; their enigmatic quality both repels and invites speculation about the author. He translated the Russian masters, and one of his most characteristic stories is "Gogol's Wife", a conversational fantasy imagining the Russian writer's possession and eventual destruction not only of a life-size female doll but of another miniature artefact, supposedly its child. As in most of

Landolfi's stories the notion is rather crude, perhaps deliberately so, an impression increased by Katherine Jason's very American-style translation, which hardly does justice to the muted shock effects in the sinuous Italian of the original. It is only fair to say, however, that she has an effective way of rendering Landolfi's dialogue and conversational techniques.

Like Nabokov and Borges, Landolfi seems implicitly to claim a special status, a status arranged and protected by the admiration of his fellow-authors. They view him with affection as an odd bird, a writer's writer; and one, incidentally, who is nobody's rival, never in competition for a public. He was, self-consciously, a magic writer, and magic is based on violence. Barbery d'Aureville and Villiers de L'Isle Adam, with their tales of cruelty and diabolical women, are obvious predecessors. In his introduction to *Words in Commotion*, Italo Calvino writes of Landolfi's "black romanticism". He specializes in the obvious giveaway, revealing allegory or Kafka-like symbol, which is then collapsed into pointlessness or cliché. "A Woman's Breast" imagines a beautiful girl with hideous and sinister breasts, a romantic fantasy which Shelley, among many others, would have been familiar with, and which goes with Landolfi's closet misogyny.

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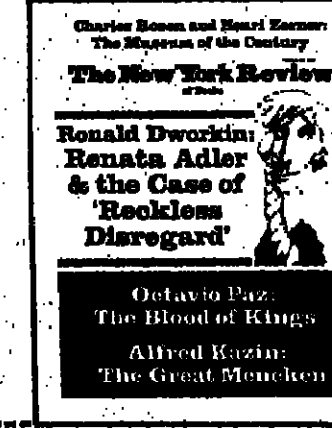
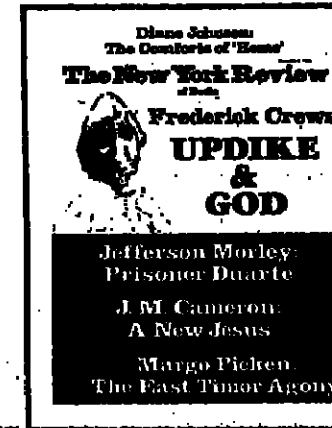
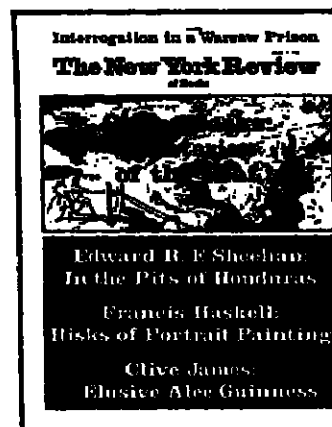
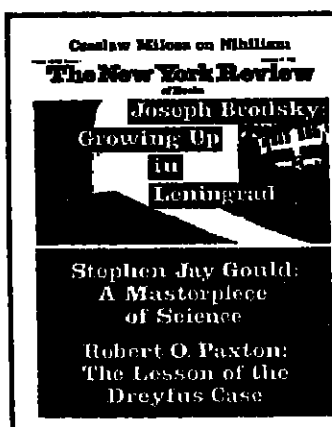
The Poetry and Criticism of Geoffrey Hill  
by Vincent Sherry

Vincent Sherry has described Geoffrey Hill's work as "a poetry that demands to be spoken, but sounds like nothing we've heard; out of the common material of speech it lifts the common tongue." In the last three decades, Hill has established himself as a major poet. In *The Uncommon Tongue* Sherry examines the range of Hill's verse within the larger context of British and American reaction to the great literary modernists of the early twentieth century.

cloth \$28.00

The University of Michigan Press  
P.O. Box 1104  
Ann Arbor, Michigan 48106 U.S.A.

In the United Kingdom and Ireland order from  
TABS, 24 Red Lion Street,  
London WC1A 4PX, England.  
Price available on request.





Like most black jokes, his tale is memorable; and technically interesting for the way in which the climax is muted into a few Gogolian musings on the sadness of life. "It would seem that we must be contented with joys that are not only ambiguous and twisted, but even fleeting." All one can say of that is that it is better than the simple shock ending, as in "Chicken Fate", where two chicken farmers find themselves trapped in a wire run and surrounded by fowls as tall as trees.

Landolfi is not in the first class. But his stories are typical of what is sometimes claimed as a modern revival of the form, a revival based on "tall stories" and the tricks that can be played with them. Tall stories are cruel in their nature, like fairy stories. You happen to disturb a witch who thereupon turns you into a frog. "A Woman's Breast" begins with the man accidentally saving the girl from being run over. Insisting that she is in his debt, she says she must grant him a favour; so, after some embarrassment, he asks to kiss one of her nipples. And so on. The heartlessness of tall stories is in perfect accord with modern critical techniques: in fact the author's device and the critic's recognition of it are virtually one and the same thing. Landolfi "uses" a tone for an effect which in Gogol is absolutely natural and moving. He gives the impression of parodying an imaginary author – a composite, say, of Ambrose Bierce, Kafka, Paul Bowles and Julio Cortázar – whom the reader cannot identify but feels he must once have read. This is the ultimate use of the fashionable dictum that all literature comes out of other literature in a perpetual spiral, and it seems to be the basis of the "new" short story. Anything goes, including the "poetic" effect, provided we can see where it comes from, and how it has been manipulated; provided there is nothing about the story which is inexplicably moving. "The Lady with the Lapdog" would seem very old-fashioned stuff in the context of short stories today. Any distinction between tall and true has disappeared.

In his introduction to *The Art of the Tale*, an anthology which runs from 1945 to 1985, Daniel Halpern insists, naturally enough, on the renaissance of the form which has taken place during that time. When did the new short story take off?

Some aficionados would date the moment from the publication of Jorge Luis Borges's *Ficciones* or Vladimir Nabokov's first translated stories. Others would locate that moment in the works of Julio Cortázar, Tommaso Landolfi, Juan Rulfo, R. K. Narayan and Italo Calvino, who picked up and extended the agreed-upon qualities of the folktale – fantasy and legend. But regardless of whose pen fired the important moment, there seems to be general agreement that a serious revival of the short story is under way, as if at this particular juncture in the parous history of our race we especially need its singular purity and magic.

Purity and magic, in this context, are ambiguous words, which might as well mean crudity and heartlessness. They also seem to stand for the boredom of a terrible efficiency, while at the same time acting as a charm against that boredom. The writer, with all the resources of his accumulated literary intelligence, or everything he has perhaps picked up in creative writing class, is out to paralyse his reader for a few minutes, as if he were some primitive storyteller holding the eyes of a savage audience. In most of these stories, extreme sophistication blends and identifies with simple sensationalism.

The threat of boredom, and the use of violence against it, is acted out in Michel Tournier's story, "Death and the Maiden", in which a young girl tries one sensation after another to rid herself of the spectre of *ennui*. This is a species of imitative chic. The reader, too, is perturbed by the thought that the narrative might bore him; and is thus compelled to follow with interest the means by which the girl tries to avoid the thing she dreads. (There are some good touches. She steals a riot policeman's automatic pistol, and after many investigative anti-climaxes manages to fire it off in a wood, where "the weapon, as if seized by a sudden fit of madness, kicked in her hands".) This same principle of imitation seems suggested by the comments on the short story form of two of Daniel Halpern's contributors. Peter Taylor writes: "The short story is a dramatic form, closer to plays than to novels", and William Glass says that for him "it is not a character

sketch, a mouse-trap, an epiphany, a slice of suburban life. It is the flowering of a symbol centre. It is a poem grafted on to sturdier stock."

The suggestion that the short story is being something rather than revealing something is echoed in the more sober comment of the old master, V. S. Pritchett, who says it is like "a ballad or a sonnet, dependent on a spontaneity which conceals its architecture". The matter is magisterially summed up by Borges himself in his comment that "unlike the novel, a short story may be, for all purposes, essential". Essentiality, like "poetry", may be a dangerous thing to aim at, none the less, and may contribute to the effect of self-imitation which is so marked a feature of the new short story. It is vulnerable to an excessive awareness of its form. "The Dead" or "The Lady with the Lapdog" do not strike the reader as self-enclosed narratives of this kind, but seem as "incapable of the absolute" as Lawrence's idea of the novel. And while most of the examples in *The Art of the Tale* hurry along as if they were afraid of missing their own endings, Joyce, Chekhov, Kafka, or Lawrence himself seem to have all the time in the world for their stories, an infinite leisure in which the reader can relax and look round.

It is the effect of leisure which leads the reader on to the story's dimension of silent meaning. Kafka has probably had more effect on these "modern" short stories than anyone, but it is Kafka's manner and situations that are borrowed; his innerness, naturally enough, remains unexplored. Two good and memorable tales in the collection, Graham Greene's "Two Gentle People" and Joyce Carol Oates's "Tryst", also make the most traditional use of the short story's conventions. Low-keyed, Greene takes his time in deploying a standard plot of the strangers who meet in a park, find out discreetly that each is married, dine together, and separate to their respective unsatisfactory homes with the thought that things might have been different. Maugham is crossed with Chekhov, but the mixture is perfectly blended, and Greene's inherent stylishness carries it off to admiration. Even more formulaic, "The Tryst" finds a rich, middle-aged American family man acquiring a young girl-friend who works in a gallery of modern art where "frantic, oversized hunks of sheet metal and aluminium" sprout out of the floor. The straight contrast is between his life-style and hers, both in their different ways equally awful, but the inside dimension is the nature of their need for each other, something subtle but elementary which suddenly declares itself when he feels the urge to show her his house. Each has undermined the confidence of the other in their own age and status. Violence follows, but it has been earned; it is part of the tale's true logic and is not gratuitous as it is in many of these stories, where it is a contrivance of the tallness in the tale.

In spite of Greene and Oates and other good examples, it is something of a relief to turn from *The Art of the Tale* to *The World of the Short Story*, Clifton Fadiman's selection of his favourites in the genre since the beginning of the century. Less committed than Halpern, Fadiman remarks in a thoughtful foreword that time is the best test. "Does the writer still speak to us with the urgency that once animated his voice? ... If Sherwood Anderson fades on my ear it should be remembered that in fifty years or fewer such fine contemporary talents as Trevor and Updike may be equally diminished." A salutary reflection: No one here has dated more than A. E. Coppard, once a doyen of the genre, but that might happen to anyone, even to Ann Beattie and Edna O'Brien. All stories deal in ghosts, but the actual genre of the ghost story has become sadly diminished, in spite of such wonderful survivors as Walter de la Mare's "A. Recluse" (not included here), one of the very few stories successful at conveying in purely aesthetic terms the feel of a house and its occupant. Ghostliness, it proves, lies in what is real, not in what can be invented. But Fadiman is probably right in regretfully concluding that de la Mare's tales belong too much to the past, along with those of Erskine Caldwell and even, he opines, Isak Dinesen.

Not many short stories resist the touch of time. That may be because they belong too self-consciously to the genre, rather than striking the reader as something on their own. The best are written at odd moments by novelists. Henry James's stories, like Thomas Mann's or Tolstoy's, seem larger than their length, as if always aspiring to the freer, more indeterminate condition of the *nouvelle*. As Fadiman shrewdly remarks, neither Mann nor Conrad are able to do themselves justice if they have deliberately chosen brevity, or had it forced on them. They have no power over the suspect magic of the short form, its swift manipulation of sentiment or fantasy, the tallness endemic in it, which suspends our disbelief but expends itself in doing so. The shortest story in the collection is Babel's "My First Goose", from *Cavalry Army*. Fadiman, who writes an admirably perceptive note on each contributor, observes that "Babel makes fifteen hundred words do a lot of work". That is the trouble, in a sense. The fewer the words, the sharper the point, and Babel is determined to ram home the message that he finds it impossibly hard to learn to kill either geese or men, but that, given the situation, he is determined to try. But why, if his Cossack comrades are what he knows them to be, is a live goose still walking about the farmyard anyway? The answer is because it is necessary for the point of the story that Babel should kill it. There is nothing implausible like that in the mechanism of Hemingway's almost equally brief first story, "Indian Camp". And Hemingway's story has something mysterious and undeclared in its background – the relation and fate of father and son – which expands instead of concentrating it into a point.

Sentiment attaches to brevity, as cruelty does. Fadiman prefers the former, Halpern the

## Bad-mouthing Modernists

John Melmoth

WOLF MANKOWITZ  
*Gloconda: The misadventures of the Mona Lisa*  
277pp. W. H. Allen. £10.95.  
0 491 03335 4

It is no part of *Gloconda's* brief to praise famous men. Wolf Mankowitz's version of the greatest art theft of the century could scarcely be accused of excessive deference towards the celebrated dead, Apollinaire, "an uncontrollable, erotomaniac Polish piss-artist", is far from prepossessing with his "turnip-shaped head", "small, red, pig-like eyes" and "little duck's anus mouth". Picasso is as "promiscuous as an Egyptian donkey", randy and deceitful. The founding fathers of modern art are the leaders of a gang of "half mad criminals".

Nor do the ladies fare much better. The "potato-nosed" Marie Laurencin, reluctant distaff cubist and Apollinaire's mistress, is an irresistibly foul-mouthed termagant, perpetually boiling with rage. Even Leonardo's first lady, La Gioconda herself, comes in for a serious duffing: she is "lardy and jaundiced", a "fat-faced spaghetti wife", a "grinning old cow", a "bitch", a "harry", an "impossible old whore". (To add injury to insult, Marcel Duchamp fitted her with a false beard.) This incessant bad-mouthing is a by-product of the novel's sustained exuberance – stretches of regular art history are punctuated with scabrous asides at genius.

In August 1911 the Mona Lisa was stolen from the Louvre. The subsequent furor revealed that Apollinaire's "secretary" – one Gery Pleret – had stolen Phoenician and Iberian stone heads from the museum for the poet and for Picasso, whose seminal "Les Femmes d'Alger" owed much to these "unconsidered prehistoric relics". Pleret was suspected of the theft of the painting and Apollinaire was actually imprisoned for a few days. Nothing further was heard of the picture until November 1913, when it was found in the possession of Vincenzo Peruggia, a slow-witted Italian house-painter.

So much is fact and Mankowitz's mustering of the material, including contemporary extracts from *The Journal* and *Le Matin*, is both scrupulous and engaging. Additionally, the unanswered question – "what art thief steals an unnegotiable work of art?" – stimulates spec-

ulation. Peruggia regarded his theft of one "priceless yet valueless" work as an act of patriotism, redressing Napoleon's crime of having stolen it in the first place. Mankowitz's interest in motives leads him to conclusions that are both more resonant and psychologically complex, and to the development of a number of characters of his own, including Daniel Lavine, the dandified and philandering dealer, James Peacock, peerless forger and last drunken relic of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, and Cleo de Marande, a whore with the nous to collect Picasso's blue-period paintings while canvases can be picked up in junk shops for a few francs. Motivation research also results in the book's finest passage – an interview between Monsieur Lepine, Prefect of the Paris police, and Signumund Freud. Freud's inclination is to account for the crime in terms of the fetishistic role of an object "which has always been fraught with profound subjective significance". The Mona Lisa is an idealization of the illegitimate, homosexual Leonardo's mother. In a dazzling display of the forensic possibilities of psychoanalysis, Lepine is put on the track of a culprit who is mother-fixated, has no father, is a latent homosexual, intellectual and artistic, of Mediterranean origins.

Mankowitz's determination to penetrate the meaning of a painting which has always been valued as an enigma results in the novel's only significant lapse: a wearisome insistence on the work's embodiment of the principle of the eternal female. It was one thing for Napoleon to sleep with her above his bed, or for Pater in *The Renaissance* to work himself up to a delicious pitch of excitement over the virgin of the rocks; it is quite another for a serious novelist to assert that "For men who are loved by women, Fate is female." The most explicit identification of La Gioconda and all women is made by Pleret, for all that he bases it on dubious etymology, taking "mona" to mean "cunt" rather than "madonna".

If, on occasion, Mankowitz leaves too little to the imagination, his prose does have the virtue of taking the shortest route between points A and B at a rate of knots. His mode of address is robust, loud-mouthed, punning, and unequivocal. The story has been told before (for instance in Francis Steegmüller's *Apollinaire – Poet among the painters*), on which Mankowitz appears to draw without acknowledgement but loses nothing in the telling: a ripping yarn, an erudite, snappy ripper.

## Days of atonement

Linda Taylor

BERNICE RUBENS  
*Our Father*  
212pp. Hamish Hamilton. £9.95.  
0 241 11979 0

As far as becoming an adult is concerned, the dice are loaded against Veronica Smiles. She is stuck with her frigidity, the frigidity of the daughter who is psychologically incapable of becoming a woman, wife or mother. Veronica has condemned herself to an absence of feeling due to her parents' having committed suicide before she was nine years old (her mother jumped off a mountain; her father inhaled carbon-monoxide fumes). Grown up, Veronica takes up a career writing factual books about her travels in deserts. She has to deny the hurt of being parentless; has to blot out the reasons for the suicides. These reasons comprise a macabre chain of events: Veronica's mother loved her father but considered her mountaineering work more important than her marriage; Veronica's father jealously took up with Millicent; her mother found out about Millicent and jumped; Veronica found out about Millicent's new baby and smothered it; her father didn't return from the garage.

Life in a Bernice Rubens novel tends to be grim: people go on living because they have to (*A Five Year Sentence*); wily babies choose not to be born (*Spring Sonata*); children are condemned to partial lives because of the manipulative cruelty of their adult relations (here, and in *Madame Sousatzka*). Rubens has never been averse to suffocating her characters in bleakness, misery or guilt; and there's a strictly leather absence of redemption.

Atonement, though, is possible, and it is the whole point of *Our Father*, which is the kind of psychological novel that aims to unravel and come to terms with a past in order to make a future at all possible. And so it is that God gets apart as a seemingly flesh-and-blood character

with many disguises: in Veronica's partially crazed world view, "He" meets her in the desert, leaves messages on her answer-phone, bumps into her regularly around London, sleeps with her (chastely) and so on. Because of her meetings with "Him" (yes, the capital aitches do become tiresome), Veronica opens the literal and metaphorical file on her past.

But with the entrance of God into her fiction, Rubens's acerbic wit has been reduced to a girlish, sacreligious jollity. God as a character is remarkable chiefly for his biblically clichéd speech and his vulgarly, both of which provide an increasingly wearing kind of jokiness. As for the forlornly bland, emotionally innocent Veronica, with her weight of tragic luggage

## Lacking the rotten guava

Antony Beevor

DENIS JOHNSON  
*The Stars at Noon*  
181pp. Faber. £9.95.  
0 571 14607 4

García Márquez once said he had learnt to describe the tropics from Graham Greene. By his method one could "sum up their mystery with the smell of a rotten guava". Denis Johnson's Nicaragua in *The Stars at Noon* is an odourless reminder of Greenland. His tale of impotence in the face of extreme alternatives may be familiar, but the rotten guava is lacking.

Set in Managua in 1984 (an irritatingly emphasized date), the book is written from the viewpoint of a young woman from the United States. Nameless, apolitical and ineffectively amoral, she is in Nicaragua as a freelance journalist of the most notional kind, and is trying to live off a land where the pickings are increasingly thin and her situation is legally pre-

## His four sons

Jasper Rees

PATRICK MCGINLEY  
*The Red Men*  
297pp. Cape. £10.95.  
0 224 02386 1

Patrick McGinley's latest novel has such a formal structure that its characters have to fight hard to be human. Its architect is Gulban, a despotic father who, on his seventy-seventh birthday, gives each of his four sons an amount of money and a year to invest it in a manner befitting their ancestors, the Red Men of the title. The declared prize is sole inheritance of Gulban's property, a hotel which dominates an isolated Irish promontory. Each brother treats this Aspicop contrivance differently. Gulban's favourite, the rakish but industrious Jack, proposes marriage to the hotel employee, the introspective Pauline, but while out celebrating he is killed in a car crash. Gulban's ensuing stroke leaves him bedridden upstairs, while downstairs the three remaining brothers compete openly for the inheritance (and obliquely for Pauline) as they await the revelations of Gulban's "Day of Judgment".

McGinley conjures up a self-sufficient universe with its own pagan order. All, including Gulban himself, allude to Gulban as a self-created god; his sons are "symbols in a dying man's cosmology". Meanwhile, the eldest son, Bosco the priest, plays at being Christ by proposing to convert the hotel into a home for supernaturated clerics. This is also to curry favour with the real God, in atonement for scrutinizing the split in Pauline's skirt. Meanwhile, Cookie, the literary brother, is entertained by the Englers – an insatiable mother who provides a berth for frustrated local libidos; and an unstable daughter who offers as much love as lust – in their house, the immured Port Knox (like the hotel "an enclave of unreality"), and like the novel itself, ineffectually self-contained.

*The Red Men* is affable, rooted in topography, ornithology and geology – furrows which McGinley finds more fertile than genealogy, a

novelist's more usual terrain. The novel is indeed partly about the poverty of the family mythology. The brothers have been brought up on tales of the Red Men; these bogus household gods have usurped the *shanachie*, the local folk historian, leaving the brothers to find out for themselves about the hill on the promontory shaped like two breasts. Maternal nature is integral to the novel because it teaches native wisdom to the headland's motherless children, whereas paternal ancestry delivers only "a litany of little untruths".

Questioning after truths, the characters abandon life for an effortful, scheming literature awash with narrative contrivances and submerged meanings. *The Red Men* is a bit like Gulban's head, "Powerful ... with little flesh to cover the jagged bone structure."

## Spiritually unadvised

Anne-Marie Conway

TONY SULLIVAN  
*In the Palm House*  
236pp. Deutsch. £9.95.  
0 233 98019 9

Rodney Luke Patterson might be cursed with a grandiose name, a family that embarrasses him and few talents other than an encyclopedic knowledge of Aztec ritual and the novels of Dennis Wheatley, but he has God on his side. With Christ striding along beside him, subversive yet protective: ("Turn the other cheek. ... They're all bean-heads, anyway"), it hardly needs a miracle to point him towards the seminary in bleak Snowdonia.

There he learns to put away childish things, like his father's preoccupation with junk, his sister's half-baked radicalism and his mother's overwhelming physicality. Religion, in this first novel by Tony Sullivan, thus becomes a way of dealing with the problems of adolescence. Changing his name to Luke, Rodney adopts the demeanour of a Spiritual Advisor, stern, intolerant, a spiritual snob and a con-

packed with psychoanalytic implications: she is neither very persuasive nor sympathetic. While Veronica does (in a symbolic sense) make amends, she is as featureless at the end (atoned and "feeling") as she was at the beginning (black-souled and frigid).

With its symbolic excrescences, its barebones characters and its schematic prose (the tight, ironic sentence is too much of a rarity), *Our Father* often reads like the script for a meaningful film – the desert as a central focus point; masses of cut-aways to scenes from Veronica's early years; high-tech dissolving effects for God. One aches, though, for less bric-à-brac and more provocative thought about Veronica's emotional life.

She gives herself to a police official, but her press card is confiscated all the same. Living on the currency black market, as she does, is regarded as tantamount to allying the Contras.

In an attempt to stop this traffic, the Sandinista authorities make foreigners pay in dollars. And to earn them, the woman works as an amateur whore in the enclave of Managua's Intercontinental Hotel. Her clients are usually pressmen, but one night, this untogther version of Paul Theroux's Doctor Slaughter picks up an English oil executive.

Endearingly undynamic, he turns out to be in danger. A sense of fair play prompted him to share Costa Rica's oil exploration secrets with the Sandinistas. Allies by force of circumstance, this improbable couple go into hiding, then fall in love. Their subsequent attempt to escape bears that shabby lack of professionalism which seems to have become the mark of a superior thriller.

Johnson appears, however, to have aimed higher, but his ambitions are thwarted by the structure he has chosen. One never really forgets that this account, supposedly given by a woman, is written by a man; and the emphasis on the vacuum in which the couple exist develops the wrong sort of unreality. Characters have to have substance before you can deny them a past and an identity.

The problem is made worse by Johnson's mouthpiece's flip bravado when it comes to descriptions and similes. Filtering everything through her becomes, not just a distraction, but a liability. Does the author intend such an unnecessary detail as the calibre of a Galt rifle to be wrong or is it just a proof-reading error? And, much more seriously – to return to rotten guavas – is the Managua of the novel intended to be so two-dimensional? Salman Rushdie's recent *The Jaguar Smile* may at times be reminiscent of those sympathetic accounts from Spain rushed out fifty years ago, but it manages to convey the reality of Managua better in a few lines than Denis Johnson in nearly a hundred pages.

firmed misogynist.

From an author with supposed first-hand knowledge, the description of seminary life is surprisingly clichéd: Rodney finds his fellow seminarians brutish and "depressingly companion", we find the priests lacking in compassion and over-concerned with the sins of the flesh. Their God is not a god of love but a god of sacrifice: sacrifice not only of self but of family, friends, even of a talent that cannot be ordered. Something has to go: seduced by a thirty-year-old pilgrim at Lourdes, forced, with fatal consequences, to reinvest himself in the affairs of his family, Luke finally gives in to his doubts and leaves the seminary with no one at his side but the devil.

Filtered through a third-person narration obviously intended to reflect his own inadequate perception, Rodney/Luke's spiritual struggles fall in the end to engage the reader. After a promising comic start, the novel becomes weighed down with significance: the over-obvious symbolism of the palm house and the use of alternating Christian names to indicate different selves offend the intelligence. It has, unfortunately, all been done before, and done better, too.

## Wintering

Joanna Motion

JANET HOBHOUSE  
*November*  
198pp. Cape. £9.95.  
0 224 02396 9

The exotically named Zachariah Quine, his New York life emptied of wife, daughter and meaning, takes flight for London, that off-shore convalescent home for wounded Americans. He briefly touches an English base in the home of the exiled brother Michael. Here is a species of stable family life: contentedly placid wife, cat asleep in blue bowl in the kitchen, boys to be taken to the zoo. But Zach is more drawn to the bleak uncertainties of an affair with Michael and Helen's friend, the "infinitely unsuitable" Anne – Anne, whose plunging into parties and marriages leaves little more than the monosyllable of her own first name for a newcomer to cling to.

Zach and Anne stand at opposite ends of their cultural alphabet:

Anne's skittishness, independence, was the English form: easy to be outlandish if the land is there behind you, waving its hankie, wishing you bon voyage, assuring its continuity on your return. In New York, if you turn your head, whole sections are likely to disappear. ... From Marlboro man to derelict, Zach with Anne had a broadsway and historical American role. Epic, he would say, next to her comedy of manners.

In the end, however, it is their likeness, their common experience of grief and hollowiness, that pushes them apart. Zach goes off to explore another cityscape, the highly coloured backdrop of Florence, chosen by his sister Dinah and other American artists in residence as the site for "beauty with conviction". Their tinselly, theatrical version of Italy holds no magic cure for Zach. He is in transit once more, back to London and an extended waiting, broken only by the promise of a transatlantic visit from his daughter, of a family Christmas to include, once again, Anne.

*November*, Janet Hobhouse's third novel, is almost as wintry as its name. His wife's departure precipitates Zachariah into a barren, shapeless wasteland. Hobhouse writes about the early, American, phase of Zach's desolation with a grim and brisk humour. Wherever she goes, Hobhouse has the eye of an alien, an observer who has yet to be inoculated by the local complacencies. She is at her best defining precisely, dispassionately, the differences between New York and London, New York and Florence; incongruous temperament and history finding expression in restaurant behaviour, manners with taxi-drivers, marital expectations. But Zach's dark nights in London, his exploration of past selves in dream and memory, descend into a clogged and densely punctuated prose, where every syllable seems load-bearing and the nouns fuse into compounds under stress. More wearying still is the adolescent self-obsession of the diary extracts sent to Zach by his estranged wife. There are times, too, when the dialogue of Zach and Anne, two people without work or money problems and time on their hands for beffy conversations, leaves the reader counting back alternate lines to check whose voice started it all.

It is a relief when Hobhouse emerges again into simple, terse, efficient writing, taking an excursion from the Inner Being into external territory: vignettes of New York – the grizzled playwright, a New York arboreal, beached among yuppies and yerps; a blind giant with his adoring dog, terrorizing a busload of passengers – or the simple remarking of ordinary life in ways that Zach comes increasingly to value. Towards the end of the book, Hobhouse applies this clarity and severity to Zach's sense of his own predicament, too, with sobering effect: "He saw himself as he must seem: pushing his life along like a peanut, on all fours and in the dust, with the screams of disappointed children in the background."

*November* is something of a virtuoso performance, an exploration of loss and emptiness from all directions, coming at the subject through letters and diaries, through the distorting mirror of another love affair, via comfortable, unsatisfactory sibling bawling. After all that, if the reader emerges like Zach himself, tired and quietened, but little further forwards, perhaps that should come as no surprise.

Jasper Rees



## Ends in life

James Kirkup

**Ikkyū and the Crazy Cloud Anthology: A Zen poet of medieval Japan**  
Translated by Sonja Arntzen  
197pp. University of Tokyo Press. Yen 4,000.  
086083403  
YOEL HOFFMANN (Editor)  
**Japanese Death Poems: Written by Zen monks and haiku poets on the verge of death**  
366pp. Tokyo: Tuttle. \$17.50.  
0848 15054

The fifteenth-century Zen poet-monk Ikkyū was a social and religious eccentric who railed at the hypocrisy and corruption of the great Buddhist sects of his time, and flouted their dogmatic arrogance with provocative verses. Yet he became an authentic Zen master and a true poet whose work combines sensuality, wit and religious illumination in a very original way. He wrote about wine shops and brothels with metaphysical rapture. He denounced the materialistic ambitions of degenerate and greedy fellow-monks, yet wrote vividly erotic poems on his own amorous exploits.

The bulk of the scholarly and entertaining book compiled by Sonja Arntzen is devoted to translations from Ikkyū's *Crazy Cloud Anthology*, or *Kyūunshū*, his major collection, written in classical Chinese style. Ikkyū lived in and around Kyoto in a period of social upheaval, during which the imperial capital suffered catastrophic drought and devastating fires through which much of the traditional cultural heritage was lost. Yet the destruction of so much that was stagnantly formal and rigidly conventional cleared the ground for new expression in the arts: *renga*, or linked verses, by various hands, Nō theatre, Chinese ink painting and calligraphy and the tea ceremony all flourished with renewed vigour, and Ikkyū and his associates were at the heart of this cultural and spiritual restoration, centred on the temples of the Rinzai sect and the creative talents of its Zen monks.

These temples were prosperous, authoritarian, closely linked with political intrigue. The monks were rich landowners, *saké* brewers, money-lenders, highly institutionalized through the patronage of powerful *samurai*, and through their cultural activities secularized to the point of decadence. This was the perfect setting for the religious and artistic non-conformist Ikkyū, who led a wild Bohemian existence in his controversial quest for a personal and comically irregular Zen enlightenment. As Professor Shūichi Katō writes in his foreword: "No Japanese poet has ever combined, as Ikkyū did, such abstract ideas and intense sensuality, such aggressive social criticism and tender lyrical imagery." He may be compared with Villon and all the other *poètes maudits*.

He is the only Zen monk to have written poems about sex in a religious context. Discipline in the monasteries was lax. Pederasty was common, and those monks who did not keep teenage pages kept mistresses. But in spite of this, Ikkyū wrote about sexual relationships as an integral part of spiritual training and as an aid to enlightenment.

Professor Arntzen introduces us to what is known, and surmised, of Ikkyū's life. An illegitimate and unacknowledged son of the Emperor Go Komatsu, he was a precocious child. At the age of thirteen he had already decided he wanted to study Chinese poetry at Kenninji Temple in the Higashiyama district of Kyoto. He memorized Chinese poems, and wrote a poem a day. By the time he was seventeen he was studying Zen, and at twenty-one transferred to Daitokuji, where he first experienced enlightenment, celebrated in the poem "Hearing a Crow, Attaining Realization":

Raging, angry, heart consumed by passions  
For twenty years. The time is now!  
Crow laughs. I leave the dust and end up an Arhat.  
How about it? In the sun, a fair jade-like face shines.

Ikkyū then began his wandering style of life, mixing with prostitutes, sandal-makers, sailors, the fishermen of Sakai, in a disgusted reaction against aristocratic and degenerate

Zen. Nevertheless, he was invited to become abbot of Nyoian, a subtemple in the Daitokuji compound, on the occasion of a pretentiously ornate memorial service for his first Zen master, Kasō. This angered him so much, he wrote an outrageous poem addressed to Yōsō, abbot of the entire Daitokuji complex:

Ten days as abbot and my mind is churning.  
Under my feet, the red thread of passion is long.  
If you come another day and ask for me,  
Try a fish shop, tavern, or else a brothel.

With this parting shot, he shook the dust of wealthy Daitokuji off his feet.

Ikkyū's work is allusive, and obscure references are made clear without pedantry. The excellent notes are in themselves a mine of interesting information about the period.

Zen monks and haiku poets often wrote death poems, sometimes long before they saw the end approaching. Yoel Hoffmann has collected them in an admirable anthology that contains the death poem of Ikkyū's master Kasō, and that of Ikkyū, also given by Arntzen:

South of Mount Sumeru,  
Who meets my Zen?  
Even if Hsi-t'ang comes  
He's not worth half a penny.

## Rebirth and dissolution

Louis Allen

**MARGUERITE YOURCENAR**  
*Mishima: A vision of the void*  
Translated by Alberto Manguel in collaboration with the author  
152pp. Aidan Ellis. £9.50.  
085628 145 X

Yukio Mishima continues to fascinate European readers and audiences, so it is quite appropriate that Marguerite Yourcenar's essay in hagiography (reviewed in the *TLS* of May 29, 1981) should now be translated into English. The novelist and playwright's history and public persona are now at least as well-known as his work, and although Yourcenar does discuss the novels she treats them as a kind of conspiracy: everything in Mishima's writing points to the final ghastly dénouement. The very metaphors echo and repeat themselves: the parturient belly in *Forbidden Colours* seems to vomit just like the spilling entrails of the young officer in "Patriotism" (referred to by her as *Togoku* instead of *Yakoku*, a mistake the translator does not rectify). Her informa-

tion is drawn partly from translations of the novels, chiefly English, and Henry Scott Stokes's excellent biography, and although she admires Mishima profoundly, she has enough to go on to be sceptical, too. She sees, for instance, the crude way in which the Buddhist theology of reincarnation is dragged into the final tetralogy, *The Sea of Fertility* (*Spring Snow*, *Runaway Horses*, *The Temple of Dawn* and *The Decay of the Angel*) are now available in one volume: 822pp. Secker and Warburg. £18.0 436 28160 0. Penguin paperback, £9.95. 0 14 006929 1; but it can't be dismissed as peripheral. Rebirth is integral to the narrative, but the void with which the last novel ends (and which provides her with her subtitle) seems to dissolve the idea of reincarnation itself.

Yourcenar's notes are important, because she uses them to question her own text. Most of them have been kept, but there are odd omissions, and one gratuitous alteration. Yourcenar discusses the scene in *Confessions of a Mask* in which the hero, as a child, is fascinated by a sturdy young nightsoil collector ("ramasseur de sol nocturne"). The original note pointed out that the word "dirt" can also be used for "humus"; as when potting plants. The note in the English translation discusses instead the word "soil" and we are told that "at

This rather absurdly abstruse death poem still remains in the possession of Shinjōan. Ikkyū's memorial temple within Daitokuji. But Hoffmann tells us that Ikkyū's actual last words were much simpler. When asked if he had anything to say, he replied: "I don't want to die."

This is a cheerful and heartening book, for the face of death the Zen ejaculations are sometimes wildly comical. Gaki, better known as Akutagawa Ryunosuke, prefaced his final poem with the words "laughing at myself", before committing suicide by taking poison. His poem makes a sly reference to his famous short story "The Nose":

One spot, alone,  
left glowing in the dark:  
my snooty nose.

Kogetsu Sogan simply wrote "Katsu" his times – the piercing cry given by Zen teacher and pupil at the instant of *safori*. The great Takuan wrote no poem: instead, he drew the character for "dream", then threw the brush down and gave up the ghost. Chogo's death-rattle went thus:

I long for people – then again  
I loathe them:  
end of autumn.

least in the American variety of English the word *soil* is both as verb, to dirty, and a noun, earth, as in "garden soil". The whole thing is otiose anyway, since Yourcenar's supposition that Mishima is using a euphemism won't stand up. The word he uses is *owalya*, literally "filth-man", and he then adds in parenthesis "funnyō kumitori-ya", "a man who removes excrement" (though the meaning is obvious enough). So the actual words *soil*/nightsoil do not arise, and therefore need no comment. Sometimes, too, the translation is quirky, "contes magiques" being rendered by "Micheen"; sometimes feeble, "détachable bon image" being translated as "evil ode" and "gigante afféterie chinoise" by "Chinese-type shallowness", which misses out the notion of simpering or whining contained in the French. But we must assume that these readings satisfy Mme Yourcenar, since she is said to have "collaborated" with the translator. On the other hand, one wonders how close the collaboration has been when solecisms like "reminding her of he who was absent" occur.

Still, it is Mishima we are concerned with, and English aficionados who know that he was a great admirer of *The Memoirs of Hadrian* will be glad to see Mme Yourcenar handsomely returning the compliment.

## The Heart of Saturday Night

IssFair wuz-honourCaw-munlarzSatdee:  
Doorjums, toff yapples, goalfish. Lie kytowid,  
Wee wenhonourGhosetrayn, mean Bare vully –

Z'krap. Unwēnchy wear gnomer twayver-tee,  
Try duh Wallsuz. Brill! Addter-reely old.  
IssFair wuz-honourCaw-munlarzSatdee.

Ease werkinnerWallasuz awlnite wunny,  
IssgeezorKev eyesoreAir. Ease reel ye'owid.  
Wee wenhonourGhosetrayn, mean Bare vully.

WenairwuzzerwindblowinoffaSee  
Izzreelynoblin . . . Jezus, cors eyezcold –  
IssFair wuz-honourCaw-munlarzSatdee.

Caw-munlarzhkfree zin! . . . Ease twennyfree,  
Kev: why tandzAnnā chaymaydoubter-gold.  
Wee wenhonourGhosetrayn, mean Bare vully.

Key addSmak (whytes turf) asswaddyshowdme  
Om-eye-life! Sed easegonergerit souled.  
IssFair wuz-honourCaw-munlarzSatdee.  
Wee wenhonourGhosetrayn, mean Bare vully.

STEPHEN KNIGHT

## The claims of motherhood

Anita Susan Grossman

**SYLVIA ANN HEWLETT**  
*A Lesser Life: The myth of women's liberation*  
309pp. Michael Joseph. £12.95.  
07181 2795 1

Sylvia Ann Hewlett's *A Lesser Life: The myth of women's liberation* is a thoughtful, compassionate study of the dilemma of American working women who are torn between the demands of career and family life. Contrary to their media image, Hewlett contends, American women are far less "liberated" than their Western European counterparts because they enjoy fewer of the supportive social services they require (for example, public crèches, guaranteed childbirth leave from work); as a result, they find their careers permanently derailed by motherhood. The book has stirred up controversy among American readers because of Ms Hewlett's tendency to blame the women's liberation movement for pursuing the shadow rather than the substance of genuine reform: although certainly a feminist herself, Hewlett faults the movement for its separatist rhetoric which tended to alienate Middle America, and, more importantly, for ignoring the crucial role motherhood plays in most women's lives. She finds the campaign for the Equal Rights Amendment (for which she herself worked) misguided in its focus on legislative sexual equality; instead, she prefers the European pragmatism that recognizes the special needs of women as distinct from men.

Hewlett begins with an account of her own struggles as a working mother in her thirties, attempting to cope with the birth of two live babies and stillborn twins while working full-time as an assistant professor of economics at Barnard College, Columbia University. To her surprise, she found that this distinguished college for women and bastion of feminism had no policy of maternity leave for its faculty – or rather, had abandoned the policies it had established in the 1930s for working mothers. Racing simultaneously against the biological

clock and the "tenure clock", Hewlett found herself in a state of chronic exhaustion. For a time, in the absence of adequate child care facilities, she was reduced to bringing one of her infants to work whenever her fragile system of babysitting arrangements broke down: her colleagues, understandably, were not amused. The outcome was that in 1981 Barnard turned down Hewlett for tenure, although her particular case had a happy ending when she was offered the job of executive director of the Economic Policy Council of the United Nations Association, a private-sector think tank. Others, she recognizes, have not been so fortunate, and have been obliged to choose between motherhood or a career on the male model – unlike their sisters in Sweden,

France, Italy and (even) Britain, where employers are more attentive to the needs of working parents and the issue of child care has not been as politicized.

Hewlett's critics have argued that she has slighted the legitimate gains achieved by American feminists by stressing the negative aspects of the movement, particularly its radical fringe. While this may be true, the larger problem is the superficiality of her cultural history, which relies heavily on stereotypes borrowed from the popular media. Hewlett arrived in the United States in 1969, and for American readers who lived through the decades she describes, there is something eerily derivative and off-base in her account; for example, she claims that "the happy housewives

of the 1950s may have been bored out of their skulls and popping Valium" (a drug unknown during the years in question). We are also treated to too many citations from rock lyrics, film history, and best sellers buttressing her generalizations.

The book's other deficiency – all the more surprising in the work of a trained economist – is Hewlett's failure to consider the overall costs as well as the benefits of the social policies she advocates. Governments can provide any number of services, given a large enough bureaucracy supported by high taxes; but do Americans really want a welfare state on the British, let alone on the Swedish, model? Italy has found it difficult to enforce the tax code which underwrites the social services that Hewlett admires, while Britain in its current economic plight would seemingly offer little enough for any nation to want emulate. Even though Hewlett's proposals would not necessarily require a full-blown welfare state to implement them, if business and government are to undertake the support of working mothers in the serious way the author demands, one would like a more detailed assessment of the costs involved. As it is, America's sole large-scale venture into subsidized motherhood (for the inner-city poor) has not been conspicuously successful, and is believed by many to have exacerbated the very conditions it was designed to remedy.

All this is not to deny Hewlett's main contention about the dilemma of the working mother, as seen in the case histories she recounts. Some of her proposals, such as lengthening the American school day, make good sense and are relatively simple to implement. Fortunately, Hewlett's concerns are beginning to be widely shared, not only by her fellow academics but by society at large: since her book was written, the US Supreme Court has ruled (January 14, 1987) that California employers must provide job-protected maternity leave for women employees who are physically disabled by their pregnancy: a small victory, to be sure, but perhaps a harbinger of things to come.



Jill Posener's 1982 photograph, one of a series which contrast "strong, humorous graffiti with the ad-man's appeals to women's traditional insecurities", is reproduced from *Women Photographers: The other observers 1900 to the present* by Val Williams (1992p. Virago. £9.95. 0 86068 624 8)

## Filial distortions

Peter Lomas

**RICHARD GREEN**  
*The "Sissy Boy Syndrome" and the Development of Homosexuality*  
416pp. Yale University Press. £30.  
0300 03696 5

Freud believed that a boy needs to regard his father as a benevolent but potent authority worthy of challenge yet sufficiently admired to act as a model for his masculinity; should the boy flinch from confronting his father or reject him outright then his own masculine identity will be impaired and he may develop a homosexual drive. Although Freud paid little attention to the kind of family configuration in which the boy finds himself, subsequent thinkers have made up for this deficit. In almost all accounts in psychotherapeutic literature of the early history of a homosexual, practitioners record that the mother was "overpossessive" and the father "distant" or "absent".

That this should be so – that an undue feminine influence should fail to encourage masculine, and therefore heterosexual, urges – accords with common sense. Yet, reviewing a recent book by Robert Stoller (the American analyst famed for his study of psycho-sexual development), Glenn Wilson, in the *British Journal of Psychiatry*, felt able to write:

There is a vast scientific literature on sexual arousal and the origins of male sex variation which Stoller ignores (and one of its conclusions is that absent fathers do not produce homosexual sons).

In the light of such disagreements a new study of this subject is of interest. Richard Green's book *The "Sissy Boy Syndrome" and the Development of Homosexuality* is an account of a research project on the development of homosexuality in boys with particular reference to the effect of parental attitudes. Green is well aware that conceptions such as a "distant father" are too crude to be of much

use, and his research relies heavily on detailed interviews, sometimes made over a period of years with the same family, in which he asks questions of "feminine" and "masculine" boys and their parents. He is well versed in the relevant literature, rigorous, thoughtful, honest, balanced; many of the transcripts make interesting reading; yet the book is deeply disappointing.

One difficulty for the reader is that Green's organization and style make it hard to discover what he really believes. He hedges his bets to an uncommon degree: for instance, in a passage which confirms Stoller's finding that the parents of feminine boys frequently describe them as "beautiful", he writes:

Whatever the objectivity of our parents' descriptions of their infant's appearance, the impression generated in the parents may be the important factor. Parents who see their infant as beautiful and feminine, and then are more supportive of his "feminine" behaviour, may be enacting a self-fulfilling prophecy. Parents expecting such behaviour as natural may not discourage it. Lack of discouragement may enhance it.

But he then goes on to say:

Alternatively, parents with behaviourally "feminine" boys may retrospectively distort their impressions of the infant's appearance in the reflected light of his current appearance. However statements from those outside the family supporting parents' impressions should be less biased. On the other hand, it could be that such comments were not actually made more frequently, only remembered more frequently.

One of the few opinions that Green appears to hold with confidence – and, indeed, the chief finding of the research – is that boys who manifest excessively feminine qualities (who play with dolls, dress in girls' clothes, etc) are more likely than others to become homosexual. One might ask: "Did we come all this way for this?"

The primary reason for Green's failure to bring illumination would seem to be that research of this kind is intrinsically flawed. It

does not sufficiently take into account the ambiguities of such a concept as the feminine and it lacks the penetration into the devastating subtleties of personal relationship that is the hallmark of the psychoanalyst and family therapist.

We are left with many questions. Can we hope to find the causes of homosexuality? Is the very aim a mistaken one? In recent years, influenced by contemporary literary criticism, some psychoanalysts have come to doubt their

theories about the causal effects of early experience and to limit their aims, when reconstructing the past, to achieving a narrative coherence. This extreme view is, to my mind, too sceptical. We should not depart so far from common sense. However remote the chance of predicting, in any individual case, that a certain set of circumstances will result in homosexuality, surely some conditions are more likely than others to foster it. How useful it is to know what these conditions are is another matter.

## WHY DON'T YOU READ IT?

ROBERTSON  
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## Raising the funds

Sidney Pollard

**PAT HUDSON**  
*The Genesis of Industrial Capital: A study of the West Riding wool textile industry c. 1750-1850*  
345pp. Cambridge University Press. £25.  
0 521 25671 2

The provision of capital for the British Industrial Revolution does not seem to lose its fascination for historians; many, no doubt, feel that here is one of the keys to the mystery of why one of the most significant changes in human history took place in the obscure provinces of an island off the European mainland. Some have treated the subject theoretically, others have conducted their empirical researches within a broad national framework. *The Genesis of Industrial Capital* proceeds on the micro-level, covering the woollen industries of the West Riding between the middle of the eighteenth and the middle of the nineteenth centuries.

No one knows the industrial archives of the West Riding better than Pat Hudson. Her impression, like that of other researchers who have studied concrete cases, is one of a great variety of methods of raising capital for expansion during industrialization.

Unlike the spinning of cotton, the manufacture of woollen textiles had been the leading industry in Britain for several centuries. Of its two main divisions, woollens were, until the end of the eighteenth century, produced by small-scale independent manufacturers, while the worsted trade had larger firms and fewer part-timer farmer-weavers. Until the French wars, the former depended more largely on outside capital through a network of indebtedness created by the granting of credit over several months, the sources commonly being staplers and import merchants. In the worsted sector, relations were much more balanced, and until the end of the eighteenth century the industry may not have been a net credit-taker at all.

Dr Hudson tends to play down the role of merchant capital in the industry's expansion. The agrarian sector was of some importance, landowners helping by erecting buildings,

lending on mortgage, often through the medium of local attorneys, or fostering industry in other ways. Supply firms, such as builders or steam-engine makers, might be other sources of credit. Overseas trade depended on mercantile credit, which generally derived in the last resort from the banking system. Above all, there was the ploughing back of profits, a potent but, as Hudson shows, elusive source of capital for the historian to deal with, because of the difficulty of valuing capital, stocks, surpluses and profits on the basis of balance-sheets or other accounts. In its early stages, when a firm was seeking to establish itself, the reinvestment of profits might represent some element of sacrifice and frugality; later on, in the case of successful firms, the surpluses generated were often higher than the partners could possibly spend on themselves, while reinvestment in the firm might extend productive capacity beyond the absorptive power of the market. In such cases, the firm would become a credit-giver within its own industry, or might invest in outside assets altogether.

In the nineteenth century, and particularly after the end of the wars, notable changes took place. Banks became more important as sources of credit, especially for overseas sales, if conducted on consignment. At the same time, the period of credit was reduced and

tended to be standardized at three months, frequently using bills of exchange. On the much-debated question of the role of the banks, Hudson has found a number of cases of bankers being directly involved in industry, using or misusing capital to prop up a firm in which they had an interest, as well as the more common repeated renewals of loan or overdraft facilities to the point where they amounted in effect to a long-term provision of capital; but these, as others have found also, were the exception rather than the rule. The records show, what many had suspected, that bank lending was generous in boom times but niggardly in slumps, just when it was needed most. By the middle of the century, much of the export trade went through the hands of foreign merchants who settled in the West Riding: the cultural influence of the German community in Bradford is well-known. However, the foreign merchants also relied on bills ultimately financed by British banking houses.

In a topic on which there has been much guesswork and arguing from single examples, it is refreshing to find a study solidly founded on broadly based data, used skilfully, knowledgeably and tellingly. There are still many business records lying unused in archives, and it is among these that the next steps in economic history ought to be taken.

## Cotton king

Julian Hoppit

**MARY B. ROSE**  
*The Grege of Quarry Bank Mill: The rise and decline of a family firm, 1750-1914*  
169pp. Cambridge University Press. £22.50.  
0 521 32382 7

On the surface, this crisply told story embodies Britain's economic history over the past two centuries. The Greg family firm and its cotton mills flourished in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries but decayed thereafter. None of the succeeding generations had the ability or success of its founder, Samuel Greg. Consequently, what was once a great business is now a museum under the motherly care of the National Trust. But as Mary B. Rose

shows, such a simple depiction is illusory. The Greys were exceptional, not typical.

The founder of this dynasty came into a formidable inheritance. His father, uncles and wife provided him with huge sums to invest. He was well connected within the Nonconformist business world, and he lived and worked in just the right place to exploit the opportunities opened up by the pioneers of the cotton industry. Success was not assured to Samuel Greg, but it was probable. Indeed, he made bad mistakes but was strong enough to survive and prosper.

His sons were less happy. Some were able, others not. They were distracted by politics, life outside the firm and high-minded paternalism. Though inattention and inability contributed to a loss of direction among them, the basic problem lay in what their father handed on. Without a figurehead, the group of mills lacked structure. One son proved more able than the others, however, managing to keep the dynasty alive, powerful and prominent. The Grege cut a large figure in the life of Manchester and its environs before the 1870s. After that their fortunes floundered. Yet this was despite a willingness to introduce the most modern machinery from America into their mills in an attempt to revive the business: American, Japanese and Indian mills had cheaper raw materials and tariffs. The Grege did what could be done, but it was not enough.

Mary Rose tells all this succinctly. Transformed from a doctoral thesis, *The Grege of Quarry Bank Mill* carries its past and its footnotes lightly. But sometimes questions might have been pushed further and other avenues explored, for though there are chapters on the Grege's paternalism and politics the book does not shake free of economic history. In consequence we have a somewhat two-dimensional view of the family and firm: little sense of personalities, of characters or ambitions, emerges. The family's Nonconformity is barely explored outside its relation to business life; its social ambitions are unclear. Yet if in the end the reader wants to know more, that is, in this case, a compliment rather than a complaint.

*Lancashire: A social history, 1558-1939* by John K. Walton (406pp. Manchester University Press. £35. 0 7190 1820 X) is a first social history of the county in which the Industrial Revolution first spread, with steam-powered factories and urban development, over a wide area. Dr Walton's chapters range from "Economic Change and Population: Crisis, 1558-1600"; through "Landed Society and Industrial Wealth: The changing distribution of power and influence, 1770-1850"; to "Ways of Life and Standards of Living: The Lancashire working class, 1850-1914"; and "The Loss of Industrial Primacy: Depression, decline, and adjustment, 1914-1939".

## The downward path

N. F. R. Crafts

**C. H. LEE**  
*The British Economy since 1700: A macroeconomic perspective*  
297pp. Cambridge University Press. £25 (paperback, £8.95).  
0 521 32973 6

This book provides an up-to-date survey of British economic development over three centuries which is accessible to undergraduates and, for the most part, to the intelligent lay person. Few, if any, scholars have the depth of understanding of both economics and historical fact over such a long period to write a completely satisfactory book on such an ambitious topic, and C. H. Lee is only partially successful. The section dealing with the post-First World War period contains few insights and relies on occasions on uncritical reading of the sources, and unpersuasive ideas borrowed from economists. By contrast, the section on the earlier period carries much greater conviction and is a refreshing alternative to the standard (and admittedly rather elderly) textbook in general use.

Lee follows recent trends in writing metaphors such as "the Industrial Revolution" and "the Workshop of the World" as potentially misleading for students approaching eighteenth and nineteenth-century economic history. He is keen to stress the importance of the service sector in the growth of output and employment, argues that British manufacturing supremacy lasted only from 1800 to 1880 and was based on small-scale, labour-intensive methods of production which made for a most unfortunate legacy to the twentieth century. Rightly, he also draws attention to the unique position in the international economy occupied by Britain with its large balance-of-payments surplus in invisibles and continuous deficit in visible trade. While there is nothing very new in this picture, Lee presents it clearly, with much interesting statistical detail and avoiding some of the implicit inconsistencies in the earlier historiography of the subject.

The chapters on the economy after 1918 make depressing reading, both because their quality is less impressive and because Lee's exposition is a catalogue of failures. He finds familiar scapegoats, including education, industrial relations, low investment and lack of international competitiveness, while a superficial examination of government policy leads him to the conclusion that policy-makers abdicated responsibility for the achievement of rapid growth. Lee's treatment of unemployment is determinedly old-fashioned, as is his apparent acceptance of some of Kaldor's theories of slow growth, and he sometimes relies on a limited selection of sources.

Lee offers interesting suggestions as to the nineteenth-century origins of the inadequate British twentieth-century economic performance, although he is not able fully to demonstrate their validity. He seems to imply that the City-based financial services element of the economy had adverse effects on manufacturing, similar to those caused more recently by oil prices, and that this was a more serious handicap than inadequacies in the provision of funds for domestic investment. More controversially, he dwells on the persistence of small-scale family enterprise, and its paralysis in the face of the changed conditions of the twentieth century, as an Achilles' heel dating from Victorian times.

What is never pinned down, though, is the nature of the "market failures" to which the economy was subject. This leaves Lee's eventual stress on "the relatively weak contribution to growth made by the industrial sector" in turn, largely a result of its unusual structure, a quotation to be used by examiners rather than a convincing thesis.

Despite these reservations, *The British Economy since 1700* is a distinct advance over other attempts to consider the long-run destiny of the British economy in that it covers a long period in a coherent and non-polemical manner.

## Playing the numbers

David Fallows

**JOHN STEVENS**  
*Words and Music in the Middle Ages: Song, narrative, dance and drama, 1050-1350*  
554pp. Cambridge University Press. £40 (paperback, £15).  
0 521 24507 9

Close examination of the medieval song repertoires is one of the most difficult tasks in musicology. The material is enormous, encompassing several interrelated repertoires in different languages and particularly involving the enormous variety of genres with Latin texts. And there is always the perplexing question of what, in fact, you are studying. This is difficult enough with the poems, where even the most apparently reliable and synoptic sources will differ in details such as the order of the stanzas. But with the music it is more difficult still. In the troubadour repertoire, for example, a melody surviving in ten manuscripts will often appear differently in each. Moreover, the notation tells us very little: rhythms are scarcely ever specified, and even where they are they can give rise to the most acrimonious disagreements about their interpretation; there is no hint at their speed; the actual sounding pitch is always open to doubt; and any information about how the melodies were accompanied is indirect, to say the least, though recent research has tended to cut that particular

Gordian knot by proposing that the most sophisticated of this music was sung without instrumental participation. Briefly, all you have is a series of relative pitches. From there you are on your own. So it is perhaps inevitable that the topic of monophonic song in the Middle Ages has over the years given rise to an extraordinary proliferation of "theories". And it is almost inevitable that if you start with a theory you are sunk.

John Stevens, in his *Words and Music in the Middle Ages*, does actually start with a theory, namely that the basis of the whole thing is number and that the virtuosity of the finest creative artists lay in their manipulation of numbers: the syllables in a line, the lines in a stanza, the stanzas in a poem. By dint of the eminent sanity that characterizes all Professor Stevens's writings, he manages to keep this theory afloat and finally uses it to propose an important new approach to the question of rhythm. The price he pays for his theory is that the book is extremely long and, in its first 350 pages at least, sometimes seems to wander. Only after that do the chapters follow with a compelling inevitability, as he finally puts together his arguments for an essentially isosyllabic declamation of the main non-liturgical repertoires—that is, he shows that each syllable should be approximately the same length, irrespective of the number of notes given to it.

Stevens does not pretend he is the first person to see the songs in that way. He points out that several Italian scholars have tended to edit

and present the songs as syllabic manifestations; but in general their work has until now never quite seemed to belong to the mainstream of research in monophonic song. What is startlingly new here is the comprehensive logic of his argument.

The most impressive part of the book begins in Chapter Eleven, a discussion of "the problem of expressiveness" which assembles medieval comments from a dauntingly wide range of sources and paves the way for a fresh view of the creative process. From there he turns to the theorists of the troubadour generation in what is perhaps the key chapter of the whole book: here he offers an entirely new and highly convincing interpretation of a crucial passage in the main thirteenth-century writer on the subject, Johannes de Grocheo, in which he lays stress on "the fundamental contrast implied throughout Grocheo's treatise between unmeasured (but harmoniously proportioned) monophonic song and strictly measured, 'modal', mensurally notated polyphonic art".

With that in his pocket, so to speak, Stevens turns for the first time to the visual record of the repertory and sees it through essentially new eyes. Again and again, details of the notation confirm the view that what you need to hear in these songs is the syllabic structure of the poems: any performance that disguises this disguises the variety and richness of the poetry. Moreover, a broadly isosyllabic approach is the only one that adequately explains the musical differences between the various surviving forms of the melodies; and it is one that at a stroke draws attention to the considerable sophistication with which the melodies were written down.

This is not a complete solution, of course. What nobody must forget is the range of materials subsumed under the notion of medieval monophonic song. So Stevens then picks his way through a substantial quantity of different sorts of music, tying together several strands left hanging earlier in the book by showing how

heard, in the York Railway Museum, did not have a very inspirational effect.

If Berlioz's actual involvement with the movement was short-lived, Liszt's was more substantial. Alan Walker has dealt briefly with this in the first volume of his biography, but Locke insists that Saint-Simonian ideals endured much longer in Liszt's life and work than an early infatuation before he turned to the more congenial ideas of Lamennais. His evidence is chiefly Liszt's willingness to perform for various worthy causes, such as refugees and the unemployed, coupled with the programmatic nature of much of his most important music and its often "elevating" subjects, even his attempt to renovate Roman Catholic church music. Finally, he believes, there is Liszt's concept of the artist as priest.

Apart from anything else, this is to bundle too much in Liszt's complicated character under one general heading. It is far more likely that Liszt took an interest in the movement because it expressed some of the ideas and ideals he already held. He had no need of the Saint-Simonians to give him the notion of the artist-priest, which in any case was not unique to him; nor did his interest in programme music, with or without a moral content, come from them. Rather it was something that caused him for a while to take their comparable ideas seriously, or at any rate to inspect them seriously. To suggest a Saint-Simonian connection through Liszt to Wagner is to push matters beyond any bounds of reason.

However, for its account of the workings of the movement and the artists who did commit themselves to its organization, especially for the material concerning the whole extraordinary Middle Eastern adventure, this is a useful book. Professor Locke has dug deep and sifted carefully, even if his sieve does at times appear to have one or two sizable logical holes in it. And he writes about a complicated area that has been the subject of much research in a lucid and readable manner. Even if one should beware of taking every coincidence with Saint-Simonism, in an age filled with ideas of religious and social utopias, as evidence of influence, there is much here to reward attention.

J. M. Dent have now reissued in paperback, at £4.95 apiece, three recent titles in their Master Musicians series: *Bach* (1983) by Malcolm Boyd (290pp., 0 460 02471 X), *Wagner* (1984) by Barry Millington (342pp., 0 460 02473 6) and *Verdi* (1985) by Julian Budden (404pp., 0 460 02472 8). Boyd's book interweaves chapters on the composer's life with others in which he describes and analyses the works, whereas Millington and Budden offer separate treatments of life and works. Each volume contains

John Warrack

**RALPH P. LOCKE**  
*Music, Musicians and the Saint-Simonians*  
399pp. University of Chicago Press. £41.25 (paperback, £17.95).  
0 274 48901 9

A movement that attracted the interest of, among composers, Berlioz, Liszt and Mendelssohn, as well as Halévy and Ferdinand Hiller and the tenor Adolphe Nourrit, is worth more than a footnote to the history of music. The Saint-Simonian ideals of religious socialism were persuasive ones to many artists, even if few committed themselves to them wholly, and Ralph P. Locke sets out to provide both a history of the movement and an account of the manner in which it touched the lives of contemporary musicians.

He is nothing if not thorough, and even prints as appendices a selection of overtly Saint-Simonian pieces by the movement's most important *croyant* composer, Félicien David, as well as five songs by the less significant Jules Vinard. They do not inspire much confidence in their chances of arousing noble sentiments among their performers and audiences; for like many a Soviet workers' chorus or politically "committed" pop-song, both genres which Professor Locke sees as descendants of Saint-Simonism, it is one thing to pronounce elevated sentiments and another to give them satisfying artistic expression.

However, it is undeniable that some major musical figures took a more than passing interest in the movement. Mendelssohn was soon to react with a sharp irritation which suggested greater attraction than he cared to admit; the causes of his rejection are not quite clear, but appear to have included dislike of the artistic authority of a few infallible Fathers. Berlioz, too, was initially enthusiastic and even seems to have considered writing pieces for the movement. Locke sees, not without reason, the *Chant des chemins de fer* as embodying Saint-Simonian ideals about the dignity of labour; but the only performance I have ever

heard, in the York Railway Museum, did not have a very inspirational effect.

If Berlioz's actual involvement with the movement was short-lived, Liszt's was more substantial. Alan Walker has dealt briefly with this in the first volume of his biography, but Locke insists that Saint-Simonian ideals endured much longer in Liszt's life and work than an early infatuation before he turned to the more congenial ideas of Lamennais. His evidence is chiefly Liszt's willingness to perform for various worthy causes, such as refugees and the unemployed, coupled with the programmatic nature of much of his most important music and its often "elevating" subjects, even his attempt to renovate Roman Catholic church music. Finally, he believes, there is Liszt's concept of the artist as priest.

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# Letters

## Government and Education

Sir, - No institution - governments, aristocracies, or universities - can survive without a little benign, corporate dissimulation. Under a cloak of seamless continuity, governments re-knit policies to fit events. Aristocrats adjust their cash flow, but retain their airs. Universities make reform more digestible by the dignified pretence that there was nothing much wrong with them in the first place.

So no one should be surprised or indignant to find some of your academic reviewers in your special issue on education (March 13) sustaining the fiction that there is nothing amiss in the structure or ethos of our higher education, or in the quality of our schools. It would be disturbing if this fiction were maintained in private. Fortunately - and I have visited over forty universities and polytechnics in the past year or so - this is far from the case.

What I find is a widespread, if rueful, endorsement of the main principles behind the Government's actions. Elsewhere, inevitably enough, the same actions are presented as an inexplicable spasm of intellectual vandalism. It would be agreeable to be able to claim credit for policies which command such extensive understanding and tacit support. But this must go in part to Mrs Shirley Williams: the sparks of any cleansing fires were there in her famous thirteen points, which date back to 1969. She got some of the diagnosis right, but - unhappily for the universities themselves - recoiled from administering any cure. The corporate dissimulation of politicians now precludes her from accepting praise for her own foresight. (We shall have to wait until the twelfth year of his new Chancellorship, when the relevant papers will be released, to know what Roy Jenkins, then at the Exchequer, was saying about university finance at the time.)

What are the main elements of the present consensus of necessity? Nearly twenty years ago, Mrs Williams talked of the need for more rational use of facilities, a higher staff/student ratio, and other money-saving exercises, such as student loans and fewer overseas students. Now the emphasis is on more economic awareness, both in university management and industrial links; greater concentration of effort, in both intellectual and resource terms, across a debilitantly luxuriant spread of departments covering forty-five universities; and the need to revitalize an ossified salary and promotion structure.

The longer these reforms were delayed, the more painful the moment of birth. Now everyone agrees that change was overdue, but argues - understandably enough - that it is under-funded. I have also heard it said that if funds had not been tight, there would have been no change at all. But *la politique du pire* is not the current philosophy of the Department of Education and Science, which is why we have increased university funding by 10 per cent this year - over twice the rate of inflation - to lubricate the gears of reform.

The need for action is only covertly acknowledged, but action itself is being vigorously pursued. The recent restructuring of the salary scale agreed between the Vice-Chancellors and the Association of University Teachers, in exchange for a 24 per cent pay increase, is a milestone that should have been passed a decade ago. But milestones are reassuring, whenever they come. The new structures will give faster promotion and better pay to younger blood. Professors will receive the highest increases - a new average salary of £28,800. If a university with eighty professors complains to the Government that six of its top people are looking across the Atlantic, the Government may suggest that they should be paid £50,000 each, and the remainder £27,000. No Chancellor of the Exchequer is likely to have his wits wrung by the proposition that to avoid flight by a few, everyone's pay must be doubled. Extra money, and the necessary machinery of management, have both been provided. The universities themselves must make the inescapable judgments of quality and priority.

Greater selectivity - both in the targeting of research, and the consolidation of departments - is proceeding in parallel. Agonizing choices sometimes have to be made. The reconstruction of some universities is being carried out

over a painfully short time-scale, partly because of failure to act earlier. But, as in the economy, the country cannot wait indefinitely for change. Many others in all sectors of the community are living through more painful transitions; shipyard workers and industrial managers do not enjoy tenure.

It would be absurd to blame British universities for our industrial decline, but entirely reasonable, in a country where the industrial contribution to academic research is less than 2 per cent of university income, to ask for a more businesslike ethos. That is what the Government is getting from universities, where there has been a sea-change in attitudes to industry; now we are trying to encourage a more energetic response from the business community itself. The universities recognize that they cannot expect to stand fastidiously to one side as the regeneration of the British economy proceeds. They also know that declining economies do not have thriving universities. The best test of whether or not these reforms are needed is to ask whether any future government, whatever its political outlook, will reverse them. Nobody I have talked to seriously believes that it will.

British higher education is in the peculiar position of being unable to congratulate itself on its own achievements: the biggest ever surge in student numbers since the Robbins era - 140,000 more full and part-time in the past seven years, mainly in the polytechnics; a much-needed increase in those doing science-related subjects, with a simultaneous buoyancy in the arts; an increase in the proportion of girls from 40 per cent to 45 per cent; greater managerial efficiency; and more outside income.

The public pretence that higher education in Britain is contracting is based largely on superior attitudes to the polytechnics. These are not only now the largest sector of higher education; they do better work in specialist fields than do some over-extended universities. This same narrow-mindedness feeds the myth that our system is tiny by international standards. Judged against the only realistic yardstick - the number of first degrees and higher diplomas it awards - Britain is ahead of the whole of Europe, though behind the United States and Japan. So this is one of those fields where national self-flagellation goes together with a certain snobbery.

Those rare souls who argue, even in private, that nothing was sufficiently wrong with the system to justify all the upheaval tend to cite the "brain-drain". In doing so, they are edging themselves into some awkward intellectual corners. The acceleration of this long-standing phenomenon is disturbing. But we hear much more about what some of our dons are draining from, than to. They are going to a country with infinitely closer ties between business and academia; but a British Government which pushes things in that direction is guilty of "Philistine materialism". They are going to a country with a top tax rate of 28 per cent, against our own 60 per cent; but any talk of tax reductions in Britain is seen as immoral. American institutions often have a far more flexible, performance-related pay and promotion structure for ambitious academics: in Britain, there is a discreet silence - scrupulously maintained in your reviews - about the appalling promotion blockages which the system has brought upon itself in the past twenty years.

The United States also combines a high rate of access to higher education with an onerous system of student loans. Any suggestion here of a modest top-up loan system, in addition to our generous grants, is denounced as an instant barrier to access. I seem to be alone in quoting Lord Robbins's thoughtful conclusion on loans in 1963, when he said that as the cost of higher education increased - and there are nearly six times as many students now as in his day - we would need to look at loans again in the interests of "justice in distribution": that is to say, social equity. "Distributive justice" is fashionable enough in other areas; but not yet, it seems, here. But again, the undeniable force of the Robbins argument is widely conceded in private.

Elitist academics "fleeing" to America are unaware of what they are going to, or they are blind to the need for reform here. Neither, of course, is true. The reality is that some are not

convinced that change will work through in time to give them the opportunities - and the higher salaries - they feel they deserve, by clearing a path through the clogged upper middle levels of the system, and providing more attractive "centres of excellence" in their subject. Another good reason to sustain the pace of reform.

And here we touch on the tenderest spot of all. Governments are not judges of academic quality; but they do have ears. Is it possible that the prestige of some branches of knowledge and research in Britain has suffered from two decades of institutional inertia? Is it possible that some disciplines are in decline for reasons which antedate Sir Keith Joseph? Could it be that in some areas, distinguished names, as well as impatient young blood, are leaving for a livelier intellectual climate? Not a whisper of this in your reviews, but a readiness to speak the unspeakable in the privacy of the cloister.

It is far more satisfying to trumpet charges of "Philistinism" at the Government. There has never been any lack of that in Britain, and our tradition of anti-intellectualism is still gaining ground for reasons it is hard to pin simply on Sir Keith, or the Tories. In Santayana's view, "To be a Tory is at least to have affections and prejudices which in their very irrationality seem to have something un-Philistine about them". He also suggested that an essential trait of the Philistine was conventionality. What could be more conventional, or more Philistine, than the assumption that cash buys quality in the humanities, or that a politician's respect for them can be measured by the extent of his unquestioning largesse? Walter Sickert once pungently derided art schools for believing that the future of painting depended on a tiny fund somewhere in the Treasury: "In clutching at the Treasury for the solution of all ills, [the painter] is like a man trying to prevent himself from falling by clutching hold of his own nose."

In higher education, what do the arts gain by the avoidance of judgments of value, so that the mediocre is funded on the same basis as the excellent? How do the humanities benefit from the pretence that the chance powdering of small and weak departments which we have sometimes inherited from the past is what we must stick with in the future: that what is real must be rational? How do inefficiency or lax management serve the muses? And what do the humanities gain by the exclusion of young talent by the sitting tenants of tenure?

All this, and more, is implicitly admitted in camera. I hear plenty of realism too about the real roots of Philistinism as I listen to anguished laments about under-read undergraduates, and indignation about the need to mount courses in English essay-writing in universities. But all that is heard when the Government sets up a committee to look at the teaching of English in schools is another silence, broken by an uneasy jeer or two. Waving cultural banners from the battlements is a gratifying pastime, but somebody has to fight for the humanities on the ground.

And so to the schools. If one of your reviewers is to be taken at face value, there is not much to worry about there either. Nobody in higher education takes that view: Vice-Chancellors are more keenly aware than anyone that in many parts of our educational system, we face a crisis of quality. The dismal leitmotiv of "low expectations" that runs through Her Majesty's Inspectors' reports is surely impartial evidence of this.

In higher education, the consequences are profoundly disturbing. Those who claim that the state schools - 94 per cent of the system - have never done better must square this with the fact that, despite their best endeavours, some of our top universities are forced to recruit about 50 per cent of their students from the private schools, which comprise 6 per cent of all schools. Nobody believes any more in all the old arguments and evasions: the crucial priority now is to improve standards in the state sector. The traditionalist reflex - to maintain the local authority monopoly and curricular control and simply cripple or abolish independent schools - seems archaic to the point of eccentricity.

The apologists for the status quo seem more attached to defunct educational credos than to the interests of their own social protégés. By

depressing the level of educational expectation, their brand of egalitarianism "keeps the poor in their place". It also gives an easy ride to the socially advantaged (to the point where I hear mutters of concern in our universities about the standards of some of their independent school students, particularly in English). Egalitarianism reinforces privilege. Even Lenin saw that.

A few months ago, in Communist China, I saw a school which would not be allowed to exist in Britain under existing legislation. It was selective, and state-funded, but required parents who could afford it to pay a minimal sum - a few pounds a month - to give the school more autonomy, and the parents a stake in the system. "Teachers of excellence" were singled out for praise and reward, and outstanding pupils had their photos pinned to the school notice board. A miniature enterprise was attached to the school, to give a flavour of economic realities. The teachers discussed their problems frankly, but there was no whingeing about the state of the patron: there wasn't much paint at all.

In Britain at present, the intolerance of diversity, and the refusal to contemplate choice for those from lower-income backgrounds, means that no British inner-city school has the option of attending such a school: it can only speculate about the results of an educational renaissance in China. But already in Britain, as in America, there are the first tremors of concern at the embarrassingly high performance of Asian students, especially in physics and engineering. We are already worried about the economic challenge of the "Pacific rim". In future, there may be a billion more people to worry about at the hub. On present showing, the Chinese could be reading more of our classics than we do in twenty years time as well.

China, in fact, has started disproving Nicholas Berdyaev's brilliant charge against socialism: "It deifies the proletariat, but has no respect for work." Maybe China is not a socialist country any more. But for those concerned with educational quality and opportunity, the question is of little interest or relevance. (Gorbachev would know exactly what Berdyaev meant, but that is another tale.)

All this is why school standards are at the centre of our educational strategy. We must continue to raise the proportion of pupils going on to higher education, which has gone up by 1.5 per cent to about 14 per cent in the past six years. Since we are facing a dramatic demographic decline - of about one third - in the population of eighteen-year-olds in the mid-1990s, this means raising the educational sights of a whole generation, and particularly of those from low-income backgrounds, women and minorities. To believe that this can be achieved merely by injecting more money into a failed education philosophy is to combine financial irresponsibility with reactionary romanticism. And as Irving Babbitt reminded us, Rousseau was the first of the great anti-intellectuals.

British higher education, already among the best in the world, is rapidly correcting the faults which it must pretend do not exist. At present, it recruits overwhelmingly and selectively from the middle and upper-income groups in society, and - unlike many schools - has no fundamental problem of quality. The only reason there is more competition between private and public schools, and unless our higher education draws more deeply on the talents of all the people, I do not see how our universities can sustain their distinction in the longer term. I would be worried by the complacency of your reviewers if I believed that it was widely shared, or if I thought they were really as comfortable with our record as they sound.

GEORGE WALDEN,  
Department of Education and Science, Education House, York Road, London SE1

Solomon Feferman, the Editor-in-Chief of Kurt Gödel's *Collected Works*, Volume 2, *Publications 1929-36*, reviewed by Philip Kitcher in the TLS of January 30, points out that the publication details preceding the review omitted to list his co-editors by name: they were John W. Dawson, Jr., Stephen Kleene, Gregory H. Moore, Robert M. Solovay, and Jean van Heijenoort.

## Special Relationship?

Sir, - I do not quite know what relationship exists between the United States and Britain: I do know, however, that it is today not "special" in any meaningful sense (see Robert B. Reich's review of *The Special Relationship: Anglo-American relations since 1945* by William Roger Louis and Hedley Bull, March 6). The elevation of that relationship to an Exalted Plane has long annoyed me partly because of the "you-and-me-against-the-world" syndrome it implies, a stance that Mrs Thatcher particularly has exploited. No matter that hapless Canada shares a 5,000-mile undefended border with the United States; no matter that we are the biggest trading partner of the United States; no matter that Americans crossing our borders make us the most visited country in the world (take that, Mr Reich, who says that Americans rarely encounter foreigners); no matter that Canada is the second largest country in the world, located between the Soviet Union and the United States, a country over which those apocalyptic missiles will fly if The War occurs: these factors pale beside the cosy relationship with that island off the coast of Europe "with a GNP per capita less than that of Italy".

And, isn't it fortunate that when the United States looked for an ally, it was lucky enough to find "another nation which spoke the same language, shared similar legal and political institutions, not to mention many of the same ancestors . . . a people it could trust"? For a moment I thought Reich was talking about us. It is also odd that when the lonely United States found an ally, it paradoxically found it in Britain, which, despite its empire, was as insular as itself: in fact, the empire seemed only to reinforce Britain's ethnocentricity and isolation, which its passing has done nothing to diminish, not make it less parochial than the United States. A British friend patiently explained to me that British electrical wiring was so complicated because "we have had electricity so much longer than you have". If Britain were a person, it would be called E. F. Benson's Quaint Irene. More annoying is the British habit, and Reich's, of referring to the United States as America: there is no such country, and is about as appropriate as calling Britain Eurasia.

The article reminds this non-historian of two things: the tremendous force in history exerted by sheer momentum: there is no real reason why Britain should figure in anyone's picture at all, except one of the past. Maybe it is a case of what Faulkner said: "The past is not dead; it isn't even past." The second feeling is that historians and other academics not only explain myths, but often help to perpetuate them, if Reich's romantic view of the world is any indication. What arrogance for Mr Reich to think that when the United States abandons Britain, the United States is isolated in "a poignant and dangerous" solitude. My complaint against him is not with what he says, but what he does not say, but should. Certainly in a real world, the relationship of the United States with Canada, however splenic at times, would be the one deserving the term "special".

TERENCE J. OLLERHEAD,  
315 Queen's Avenue, New Westminster, British Columbia, Canada.

Sir, - No one can say that Robert B. Reich doesn't read the books he reviews (March 6). In fact, he reads them so thoroughly that in writing the review he forgets which words are his and which belong to others.

In *The Special Relationship*, Sir Michael Howard says, "the [Churchill] regarded it as an alliance of equals in which any shortfall in Britain's economic power would be made up for by her political skills and historic wisdom". In the first paragraph of Reich's review there is strikingly similar language without benefit of quotation marks or attribution. According to Reich, "Churchill regarded the alliance as one between equals; any shortfall in Britain's economic power would be compensated by her political skills and historic wisdom".

That is the only most serious of the several faults to be found in Reich's review. The statement attributed to Macmillan, "We . . . are Green" and so forth, was made in 1942 and not during the period when Macmillan served

as Prime Minister, as Reich suggests. Further, Reich tells us that Eden and Eisenhower had a "close personal" relationship. That will come as news to both men's biographers.

Reich deplores the fact that "the vast majority of citizens of the United States speak no foreign language, encounter few foreigners in their daily lives, read little or nothing about happenings beyond their border". Consequently, the United States is ethnocentric and has only a "limited ability to understand and collaborate with the rest of the free world". Presumably, Reich knows of several countries, other than Luxembourg and Liechtenstein, where the majority of citizens do speak a foreign language, meet foreigners every day and read avidly about events beyond the borders.

Finally, Reich tells us that it was "American impatience" that led to the interruption of the Anglo-American relationship in 1956 at the time of the Suez crisis. Most historians, lacking the benefit of Reich's scholarship, still believe that Anthony Eden's deception of President Eisenhower had something to do with it.

D. F. SHAUGHNESSY,  
17 Manor Court, Grange Road, Cambridge.

## 'Road to Victory'

Sir, - With reference to correspondence on the subject of Enigma from Martin Gilbert (March 13) and others, may I stress that, in my review of Volume Seven of the Churchill biography (February 13), in no way did I wish to detract from the remarkable pioneer work done by F. H. Hinsley. As Mr Gilbert himself rightly points out, no work on Enigma and Ultra could be carried out today without proper attribution to Hinsley. What, of course, was pre-eminently important in the Gilbert biography was the revelation of the specific use to which Churchill put the Ultra information. This seemed to me a point which had not been sufficiently recognized by other reviewers. I certainly hope that Sir Harry Hinsley was not in any way left with the impression that I had slighted his achievement.

ALISTAIR HORNE,  
21 St Petersburg Place, London W2.

## Savonarola

Sir, - Although it is true that Savonarola is not a very appealing character in many ways (it is difficult to forgive him for the "bonfire of vanities"), nevertheless to stigmatize him as "entirely lacking in affection" and "distant from common human interests and feelings", as does the reviewer of Franco Cordero's *Savonarola* (February 20), seems less than just.

A reading of the letter he wrote to his father from Bologna after he had fled his home at the dead of night to join the Dominicans, reveals a passionate man deeply attached to his family. He first tries to convince his father that he could not have done otherwise than follow God's call and that his father ought to rejoice rather than mourn, but then he goes on to explain why he left as he did:

Do you not believe that it was a great pain for me to separate myself from you? Please believe me when I say that never since I was born have I experienced greater pain or greater affliction of mind than when I saw myself abandoning my flesh and blood to go amongst people unknown to me, to make to Jesus Christ the sacrifice of my body and to sell my own will into the hands of those whom I have never known . . .

But because I know that you complain about the fact that I left secretly and almost fled from you, know that the pain and anguish which I felt in my heart at having to leave you was so great that if I had made it manifest to you, I truly believe that my heart would have broken and my thoughts would have prevented my action . . . So I pray you, dear father, to put an end to weeping and not to give me more pain and sadness than I already feel . . .

At the end of the letter he asks his father "como virile" to comfort his mother and in a postscript he commends to him his brothers and sisters, and particularly Alberto (the youngest) to make sure he gets on with his lessons. The devotion he inspired in his followers would also seem to bear witness to a warmer, more natural side of his character than is revealed in his prophetic role.

L. A. ZAINA,  
School of Modern Languages, University of Liverpool, Liverpool.

## Philosophy and Neuroscience

Sir, - Allow me to correct one of several misrepresentations of what I wrote in my review of *Neurophilosophy* (February 6) which Patricia Churchland perpetrates in her letter of March 13: this is that I am hostile to interdisciplinary collaboration between philosophy and the sciences in trying to understand the mind. The accusation is the opposite of the truth, as should have been perfectly clear from my review (see the first sentence). Indeed, I am myself actively engaged in such research - Kenneth Craik, whom Churchland approvingly cites, being a particular interest of mine.

My objection was rather to Churchland's rejection of other kinds of philosophy, the kinds that aim for specifically philosophical knowledge or understanding. Such philosophy, which has always been at the heart of the subject, is scorned by Churchland as "dead-end" and "know-nothing". I thought it appropriate in my review to register a brief protest about this breathtaking dismissal of much valuable work, citing a number of distinguished contemporary philosophers as coming in for the chop.

As it happens, I was reviewing Thomas Nagel's superb book *The View from Nowhere* at the same time as I was reviewing Churchland, and I couldn't help reflecting that it is just this kind of "pure" philosophy that Churchland wishes to consign to the flames. I wondered then, as I do now, whether she can really be serious. I hope not.

COLIN MCGINN,  
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## The Naming of 'Northanger Abbey'

Sir, - I read with interest David Nokes's review (Commentary, February 20) of the recent BBC 2 adaptation of *Northanger Abbey*.

By chance, that same day I came across, on a 1950 large-scale Ordnance Survey map of part of Surrey, the place-names: "Northanger" and "Austen's Wood". They appear, only a mile apart, in the area between Munstead and Busbridge, about two miles south-east of Godalming. (On the latest comparable map I see Northanger seems to have been renamed "Stilemans".)

Can any Jane Austen scholar say whether this is only a cartographical curiosity or whether, perhaps, the collocation is of sufficient antiquity to have had something to do with her choice of title for her novel?

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4 Vicar's Row, Alfred Street, Wianage, Oxfordshire.

## 'Le Regard dans le texte'

Sir, - Stephen Bann's enthusiastic review of *Le Regard dans le texte* by Claude Gandelman (February 6) surprisingly makes no mention of the seminal work by Michel Butor, *Les Mots dans la peinture* (1969). This work, admittedly less all-embracing - dealing, as it does, only with paintings ranging from the end of the Middle Ages to our own times - none the less draws our attention to the interaction between verbal and visual signs in a most thought-provoking way.

PETER GRAS,  
16 Chemin du Naniet, 1245 Collonge-Bellerive, Switzerland.

## English Literary MSS

Sir, - It was interesting to see the letter of Michael Holroyd and Paul Levy in your issue of February 27, which appeared under the heading "English Literary MSS". Readers may like to be reminded that the *Index of English Literary Manuscripts* has been publishing descriptions of manuscripts of principal authors of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries since 1982, and of the fifteenth to seventeenth centuries since 1980. The *Index* too is seeking funds for its work.

JOHN E. DUNCAN,  
Mansell Publishing, 6 All Saints Street, London N1.

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## Basil Blackwell

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## COMMENTARY

## Pantomimes of power

Michael Gilson

**RYSZARD KAPUŚCINSKI**  
*The Emperor*  
 Adapted by Michael Hastings and Jonathan Miller  
 Royal Court Theatre Upstairs

Ryszard Kapuściński's book is full of the whisperings of hunted Ethiopian courtiers, voices out of the darkness of hiding places that could not save them from Mengistu's troops. They create a world of power and of fantasy. What was performed, what was merely performance, whether there was such a thing as mere performance, became troublingly uncertain in their telling of life in the court of the King of Kings and Lion of Judah.

Michael Hastings and Jonathan Miller, in their excellent adaptation of *The Emperor*, have seen how intensely theatrical these tellings could be in themselves. Haile Selassie's world of ceremonial minutiae, in which no word or gesture is too small to be insignificant, translates naturally to the stage because it is, at one level, a series of reflections on the relation of show, acting and effect. Everything counts, or might count. The whole body is involved. Backs bend sinuously down to hear the deeply ambiguous words of the tiny Emperor. Chests square, then go rounder as power grows. Faces are grazed, lit up by the royal regard. Shoulders jostle, elbows jab. To be noticed, to have name and face only connected in the imperial brain: the courtiers' eyes glitter and we can feel their pulses race.

The Emperor's ear, unnaturally large on this small personage, is the supreme organ of state. Spies spy on spies who in turn spy back, and each one murmurs discreetly to the monarch as, surrounded by these jacks and hyenas, he delicately feeds his lions and leopards. There is as much information as there are informers insatiably to invent it. All is oblique, everybody is at an angle.

Agony is everywhere, but there is also the professional pride of the truly subservient. What dangerous bliss to be the doorkeeper of the Third Door through which He will pass, and to risk being a split second too fast or too

slow, thus threatening the all-important timing of the royal performance; to know correctly the height of all the thrones and the precise size of the cushions to be slipped, expertly, beneath the royal feet just as His Majesty sits down, thus avoiding the unedifying spectacle of the regal legs dangling ingloriously in space. Triumphant to overcome the risk each time creates a new delicious thrill of perfected subordination. The dexterities of powerful and powerless are well caught in this production.

The first act is a comedy of the unnerved. On Richard Hudson's desolate set (lit by Ace McCarron) with its multiple doors, bricked-up window, blue-grey paint streaked and splashed on the walls and dusty floor, the actors move quietly with confidence or deep unease as they slip in and out of the narratives and characters. Their grey suits make them universal figures in attendance on an autocrat. Miller and Hastings realize the dreadful humour in the pantomimes of all power, not least when pantomime is built on famine and lives can be lost in an instant.

The second half shifts to a different structure and pacing. Historical events take over, rituals are displaced. The seemingly timeless world of the court is revealed as swept up in what becomes an avalanche of protest. The educated young return from abroad with ungrateful demands for reform. The governor of a southern province hands over his bribes to build schools. The Western media discover famine. The Army rebels and its officers in their uniform reflector sunglasses arrive to dethrone the old man in his empty palace. Even the last desperate measures of dams and cathartics, both equally absurd, cannot save him.

Polish readers may have seen in *The Emperor* a portrait of Gierek and there are other candidates. But the play does not depend on such decodings. The excellent actors, Hepburn Graham, Okon Jones, Stefan Kalipha, Ben Onwukwe and Nabil Shaban, disconcert because they create a world that is strange and uncomfortably familiar. At times I felt that the abyss over which the comedy hangs was lost to feeling, and that our laughter was a fraction too easy. The smell of fear and the weight of silences are not yet quite sustained. They will be. This is a spare and chillingly effective production which makes an audience take in the realities of power.

framework has dated. The High Victorian concern with Tom's moral education and the redemption of Grimes, his cruel master, belong to their moment, and their deeper Christian message is now less familiar.

Granted the various difficulties involved in translating the novel into a form accessible to the children of today, its dramatist Willis Hall and the actors of the Flying Torteoise Company, have done well. A substantial amount of re-writing is inevitable, but the play retains much of the original structure and a fair amount of the dialogue. Song, dance and rapid scene-changes successfully re-create the book's protean qualities, and the company, doubling and tripling roles, perform with verve. The play's first half presents the events at Hawthorn as a comedy of class relations in a style reminiscent of pantomime. This undermines the book's unquestioned hierarchies, just as Tom's engaging pertness somewhat undermines the pathos of the original.

The underwater episodes, dramatized in the second half, provide the main challenge for the producer. The production is here at its most inventive, employing luminous fishes; sea-monsters and water-babies as well as that camp routine without which no children's play is deemed complete, performed by a lobster. Grimes's salvation from a purgatorial chimney provides a surprisingly effective climax. The audience were very young, many of them too young to grasp more than the outlines of the action, but they enjoyed the spectacle and voiced a sense of communal pleasure and excitement that only live theatre can give. This is just the kind of occasion for which Oxford's Playhouse is supremely well adapted. With its closure, now imminent, we are painfully conscious of what we are about to lose.

## A part for the proscenium

P. N. Furbank

**LUIGI PIRANDELLO**  
*Six Characters in Search of an Author*  
 Olivier Theatre

It is a puzzle that anachronism – for instance playing baroque music on anything other than baroque instruments – is at present a black crime in the eyes of musicologists, yet it counts as a virtue, indeed is practically obligatory, on the part of theatrical directors. Well, we can live with this paradox (we had better). But Pirandello's *Six Characters in Search of an Author*, there can hardly be a doubt, presents a very special case. This being a play specifically about playwriting, one would expect one aspect of the text, at least, to receive religious attention: I mean, its theatrical allusions, and especially its stage-directions.

The play offers irony after irony at the expense of the proscenium stage, and the two occasions on which the curtain is lowered (once by mistake), and the occasion on which it is expected to fall and does not, are all saturated with significance. Thus to decide to play it on a curtainless open stage, as at the Olivier, is a dotiness at which the mind reels. For one thing it means denuding the play of a leading character, ie ourselves, the audience. When Pirandello's Director moves himself from the stage, the better to observe the interloping drama which has erupted upon the set, he is supposed to have crossed a metaphysical frontier and become one of us – a point quite lost if there is no visible frontier to cross. Again, at the end, five of the Six Characters are meant to make their exit behind the back-drop, while the Step-daughter rushes off, wildly laughing, in the opposite direction – through the stalls, where we are sitting, and out into the foyer and the street. This raw and ragged edge to the play is essential in more than one way; and it is a sharp reproach to Pirandello to send his Six Characters off, as a united family, in a religious candle-lit procession *à la T. S. Eliot*.

Pirandello himself spoke of this play as having, in a way, been blessed; its ingenuities and paradoxes, contrived and "engineered" as they are, proliferate with a kind of natural abundance. The reason, perhaps, is partly that the drama for which the Father and the Step-daughter are so desperate to find an author, is a truly impressive one. It was suffocating for the

Father to live with a wife of such well-meaning motherly heart and impenetrable stupidity, and it was also tempting to, as one might say, the casting-director in him to push her into adultery with one of his own clerks – just another such humble, good and bungling character as herself. But the arrangement having been affected, nothing would do for him but that he must spy upon its results. A man who cannot bear to be with people, but yet cannot bear to leave them alone: this is a quintessentially Pirandellian theme and a thoroughly convincing one. Thus one is in a mood to believe in the "Sophoclean" peripeteia that the Father and the Step-daughter (the fruit of that contrived adultery) are so obsessed with re-creating: their meeting, years later, as client and prostitute in Madame Pace's high-class miller's-cum-brothel. Their mania that it shall be done right, that if done wrong it will topple into opera or cliché, is at once comic and moving.

The losses in the present production, and there are many, mainly flow from the willful blindness on the subject of theatrical conventions. I am glad to say, though, that this significant play is still very much alive on the South Bank, if a little shorn, depleted and drained of its energy. As the Father, Richard Pasco gives a wonderfully resourceful performance; one's only small cavil is that this entirely reasonable and conciliatory figure, discreetly (except for a few flashes) concealing his boiling passion, lacks a grain or two of bawdily dignity, the quality which made Pirandello (disobeyed here) endow him with copious whiskers. It cannot but take some poignancy away from the scene at Madame Pace if, as here, one can imagine the Father taking liberal *Guardian*-reader attitudes towards it. It is, perhaps, for a related reason that Lesley Sharp's Step-daughter seems too prone to forget her unappeasable rancour against the Father: the two, united by their aesthetic preoccupations, strike one as in a positively genial state of *camaraderie*. Robin Bellamy's perceptive Director, however, is perfect.

Changing the play being rehearsed before the Six's takeover to *Hamlet* instead of Pirandello's own *The Rules of the Game*, probably makes sense in practical terms. All the same a play with so much to say about acting, if not about playwriting, is powerful magic to lose, and with the "What's Hecuba to him?" speech Shakespeare seemed to be attempting a takeover of his own.

## Extravagant advances

George Craig

**MARIYVAUX**  
*The Triumph of Love*  
 King's Head Theatre Club

Press night was the 255th anniversary of the first night. The play had a mixed reception then, and perhaps things haven't changed all that much. Almost from the opening line, the first scene moves into the point-by-point recounting of a notably tangled story-so-far. We learn of an unscrupulous prince and a faithless lover, the revolt and revenge of a wronged general, the subsequent bearing and concealing of a child, the eventual discovery of that child, now a young man, by the young princess who has succeeded to the usurped throne. Nothing unusual in such goings-on – indeed echoes of earlier instances take us back beyond the story of Phèdre and Hippolyte to that of Uriah and David – except that here they form the jumping-off place of comedy.

But now the real intriguing begins. The handsome prince is in the care of two moral dragons; a bookish recluse and his equally austere and virtuous sister. The lovestruck princess resolves to get past them and their servants by dressing herself as a wealthy young man and her maid as a manservant. Their unguarded talk is overheard by Arlequin, but servants can be bribed. For the guardians, more desperate measures are needed: the princess, alternating disclosure and concealment, overwhelms each with protestations of love, and under cover of their confusion, wins the hand of her prince.

It is not an easy play: we are a long way here from the Marivaux of benign deceptions and disguises that we find in, say, *Le Jeu de l'Amour et du Hasard*. There it is clear from the outset that love is an unquestioned good, that hero and heroine are perfectly fitted both for it and for each other. Schemes and obstacles serve only to protract the delay of a gratification which the elegant verbal by-play we call *vaudeville* further sharpens. In *The Triumph of Love* verbal by-play turns into equivocation, and love into an end that justifies any means. The plot turns on the seduction in parallel of the ascetic Hermocrate and Léontine by the shrewd and determined princess, appropriately disguised in gender and name. For it is love, we must see them yield reluctantly to it, and the deceit becomes heartless. The scenes may be funny, but it must be a different sort of fun. For in this play Marivaux has tried to combine the caricatured clartés and tropes of the *commedia dell'arte* with the more varied variety of human interchange.

Sadly, the King's Head production offers the worst of several worlds: caricatures of the *commedia dell'arte* (Arlequin), of the *commedia dell'arte* (Damas), romantic-dramatic (indeed, dramatic) vibrancies and posturing (the princess), uncertainty of mode (Hermocrate), "frankness" with "freedom" and slip into the "I am wise to their identities" or "problem". There are several plays here, and of them much like Marivaux's.

## Three-second style

David Nokes

**The Media Show**  
 Channel 4

Popular television constantly aspires to the perfect status of advertising. The advertisement is television's haiku, a quintessence of stereotyping beside which the formulas of soap-opera seem derivative and second-hand. Often more artistic precision and financial resources are invested in the thirty-second commercial break than in the thirty-minute programme which surrounds it. Channel 4's new fortnightly *Media Show* offered some lively insights into the relationship between advertising and programme content.

The creators of the American series *L. A. Law*, explained the differences between this and their previous hit show, *Hill Street Blues*, entirely in marketing terms. The intention, the designer boasted, was to make the new show "as much like a commercial as possible". In place of *Hill Street*'s conceptually dark world of unresolved plots, *L. A. Law* was specifically designed as a product with a "rich cool look" to appeal to a yuppie market. Jeremy Brock, one of the originators of the BBC's *Casualty* series, acknowledged a debt to *Hill Street Blues* in his thinking, but lamented the lingering and dire influence of the English theatrical tradition on television script-writers.

Young writers were always thinking in terms of three or four-minute scenes, he complained, contriving to make three minutes sound like an epic. They had still not adapted themselves to the three-second style of advertising. Above all they were still addicted to words, clearly a mistake in his view. However, the creators of *L. A. Law* acknowledged that words need not be too much of a problem provided they were properly packaged as part of a total product concept. "Wordy" was a term they chose to describe their new series to distinguish it from

## Keeping in touch

Alice H. G. Phillips

**84 Charing Cross Road**  
 Curzon, Mayfair

*84 Charing Cross Road* seems a dated valentine in these days when letters are seldom a friendly form of communication, when English literature has ceased to bind speakers of the language together, and when Americans, although they come to see the art, the theatre and the history, no longer look up to London as the prototype of a great city.

David Jones's film, starring Anne Bancroft and Anthony Hopkins, is based directly on the book, which – for those few unfamiliar with it or its television or stage versions – comprises letters exchanged between 1949 and 1969 by Helene Hanff, a writer living in Manhattan, and the staff of Marks and Co, antiquarian booksellers in Charing Cross Road. The film's structural weakness is that it faithfully transcribes this collection of letters on to the wide screen; the few different ways it uses of reading aloud sparingly-cut letters, in chronological order, do not constitute a solution to how to present this material in an effective way when the mouths reciting them are a metre high and the voices are pre-recorded. Bancroft fulminating above her typewriter or turning to address the audience beyond the camera is good for a few letters only. Nor does the film use its resources to convey the love of books which is the foundation of the story. The only substantial literary quotations are from a Donne sermon, which works, and of a Yeats poem, which is embarrassing.

Few helpful additions are made to the book's thin plot of foot-packets to still-rattled London, cash shortages in high-rent New York, and getting to know – only in a limited way, of course – distant people. Hanff's writing jobs, including television mysteries for the "Ellyory" show, and her varied New York friendships, are left sketchy, while the private

the car-chase variety of cop-show. Like the "rich cool look" the "wordy" style was part of a deliberate marketing strategy, displayed like an expensive designer label.

The *Media Show* went on to consider the relationship between Hollywood and the Pentagon in the making and marketing of two recent war films, *Top Gun* and *Platoon*. War is a commodity with a constant appeal and *Top Gun*, which treats it as a form of computer-aided skylarking, was made with full Pentagon approval and co-operation. The film has not only grossed over \$170 million but has also brought teenagers flocking to join up. Asked what he thought about *Top Gun*'s effect as a recruitment commercial the producer grinned and said "That's showbiz!" *Platoon*, which takes a grimly unheroic view of the Vietnam war, received no such official blessing. Yet the director, Oliver Stone, recognized that even his gruesome images might have some positive appeal for the kind of thrill-hungry adolescents who cheer at a scene where an old Vietnamese woman has her head caved in. Negative advertising is always a tricky business whether the campaign is anti-war, anti-heroin, or anti-cigars.

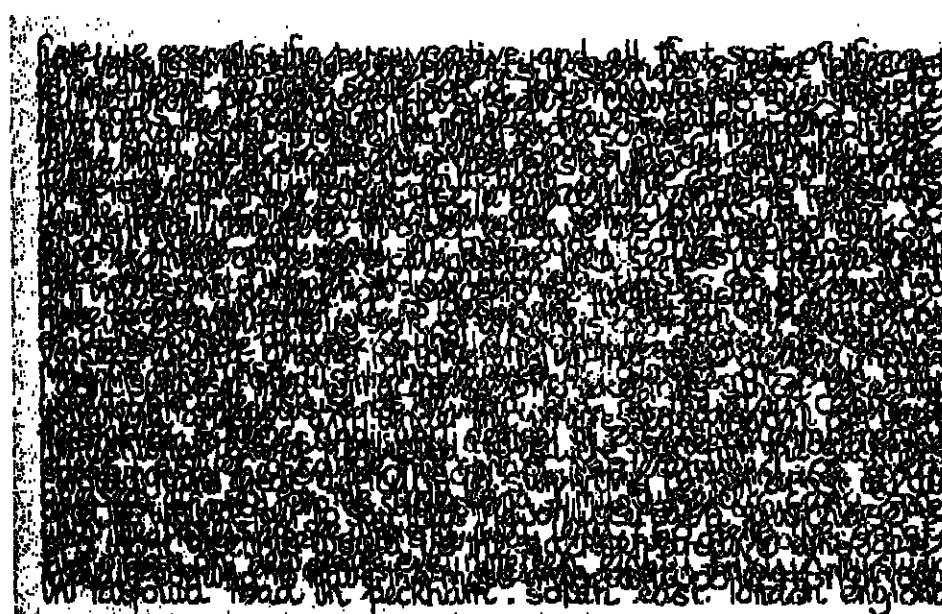
Sandwiched between these two items on art as a form of advertising was one on advertising as a form of art. Using the Impulse body-spray advert, the programme borrowed Clive James's technique of showing us how those funny foreigners do things differently. Even when acting on impulse the romantic Englishman always pays for the flowers he thrusts into the fragrant lady's arms; the more impulsive Italian steals them. Impulsive English women still conceal their breasts from the camera, while impulsive Scandinavian women bare their nipples and impulsive Eastern women merely expose their ankles. This slick world tour of romantic fantasies conveyed in seductively wordless three-second shots was like a précis of the latest, glossiest soap-opera. Impulse is the essence of which *Chateaufort* is merely the synthetic by-product.

life of Frank Doel, Hanff's chief correspondent at Marks and Co, is a nullity as presented here (Judi Dench is wasted as his supposedly spirited wife). What happened when Hanff finally got to her dream city, in 1971, as recorded in her *Duchess of Bloomsbury Street*, is left out of this narrative, except for a brief view of the plane flight and the pilgrimage to the vacated shop in Booksellers Row.

Nor does David Jones try to open up the letters by placing them in their historical time, which one might have thought would have been the meat of the story; he merely sticks a few props behind the letter-writers. There are gorgeous 1950s hats and cars, an interior of a bygone delicatessen, a sharp vignette of Doel among the miniskirts that tells us it's 1965. But too many scenes take place in nondescript interiors and focus on nothing but the spate of words; there is little sense of the texture of life as lived in the two cities over the twenty years of the story. Reality intrudes in a big way only for the Coronation of Queen Elizabeth and in the long scene mixed with newsreels in which Hanff is arrested outside the library during the student protests at Columbia University.

The film has more in common with Jones's *Betrayal* than at first meets the eye: it has its own kinds of bleakness and obsession, and is equally fascinated by unadorned spoken words and close-ups of the faces speaking them (Jones goes at the end for a *Betrayal*-like juxtaposition of speeches that fatefully rush past each other). But this film programmatically opts for the broad market reached by the book, from its opening shots of sunrise-over-the-clouds and London-monuments-by-taxi, to its presentation of the love affair that wasn't, to Bancroft's last line, "I finally made it, Frankie"; there are dozens of babies and dogs and smiles in between, and laughter over the cute way Englishmen pronounce "raspberries". All of the performances are much narrower in range than those the actors are used to giving. In stereotypes of the sentimental, national differences make no difference at all.

## COMMENTARY



"The Calligrapher Replies (Here We Exemplify)", 1987, a painting by Tom Phillips, which can be seen in an exhibition of his works at the Angela Flowers Gallery, 11 Tottenham Mews, London W1P 9PJ, until April 4.

## The trombone effect

Peter Dickinson

**LORD BERNERS**  
*Count Omega*  
 Adapted by Mike Steer  
 Radio 3

Lord Berners's fourth novel, *Count Omega* (1941), is the story of an episode in the life of a pretentious young composer called Emanuel Smith (Berners had partly in mind the career of William Walton). In quest of an idea for his latest orchestral work, Smith rushes out into the street during a storm and in due course arrives at a party where he knows nobody. It turns out that he is the guest of the legendary Count Omega, who never appears, and that from time to time the Count allows his young glances of a protégée, Gloria, to meet people – otherwise he keeps her entirely to himself. When Gloria does emerge, her entry is carefully stage-managed. It needs to be, since her performance on the trombone is a hoax – there are several players of that instrument concealed behind the curtains.

Emanuel Smith falls in love with Gloria and with what he assumes to be the sound of her instrument. When he discovers this is a fake he is angry, but it is too late to stop the trombone effect he had supposed her to have achieved from being the climax of his symphony called *The Last Trump*. The Count has sponsored the concert, which is a formidably fashionable occasion in the presence of the Queen Mother.

## AUTHOR, AUTHOR

Competition No 322  
 Readers are invited to identify the sources of the three quotations which follow and to send us the answers so that they reach this office not later than April 17. The solution and results will appear on April 24.

1 Often and long, Hilda lingered before the shrines and chapels of the Virgin, and departed from them with reluctant steps. Here, perhaps, strange as it may seem, her delicate appreciation of art stood her in good stead, and lost Catholicism a convert. If the painter had represented Mary with a heavenly face, poor Hilda was now in the very mood to worship her, and adopt the faith in which she held so elevated a position. But she saw that it was merely the flattered portrait of an earthly beauty; the wife, at best, of the artist; or, it might be, a peasant-girl of the Campagna, or some Roman princess, to whom he desired to pay his court.

2 I met the girl I was to marry after finding a note from her at the porter's lodge in Balliol protesting against my inaccuracy in writing, during the course of a film review, of the "worship" Roman Catholics gave to the Virgin Mary, when I should have used the term "hyperdulia".

3 I stayed there a few minutes, and came to the conclusion that if I could persuade myself to believe in the Christian account of this life – and the essence of it, the self-sacrifice of a god for men, seems to me too good to be true, and the rest of it, the theological jargon, lit by hell-fire not worth having – I should

Everything builds up to the actual performance where the final coup – Gloria's emergence, complete with trombone in a bank of clouds – goes wrong. The electronic device used to simulate her playing fails to switch off. Gloria eventually lowers the instrument from her lips, yet the sound continues, and the audience riots in fury. But all ends happily for Emanuel Smith since a scandal is good for modern music, and he forgets Gloria and goes back to his fiancée.

It is an entertaining story with many ingredients typical of Berners – like Count Omega, he enjoyed practical jokes which led to embarrassing situations – and even the minor characters are created with acute ironic detail. In adapting *Count Omega* for the Radio 3 production, Mike Steer was able to use much of the dialogue from the novel. The use of Berners's own music for that of Emanuel Smith seems absolutely right; the early piano pieces (played by Steer himself) were also heard in the composer's settings for chamber orchestra. These 'highly original works help to make Smith more credible than he seems on the printed page.

The casting was admirable and varied. Rupert Graves caught exactly the right ingenuously naïve as Emanuel Smith; Gloria's adolescent drooling, as she gorged herself on pastries, was hilariously revolting in Annette Badland's performance. John Theocaris's production ensured that momentum never faltered. As a result *Count Omega* was magnified by its translation from novel to radio play. Lord Berners's fantasy became a musical extravaganza.

either join the Catholic Church or fall in with the Salvation Army.

Competition No 318  
 Winner: G. E. Smith

Answers:  
 1 The divine took his seat at the breakfast-table, and began to compose his spirits by the gentle sedative of a large cup of tea, the demulcent of a well-battered muffin, and the tonic of a small lobster.

Thomas Love Peacock, *Crotchet Castle*, chapter 2.

2 On a mid-December day, crying sausages for myself, I abruptly fell under fingers thirty years younger the rim of a steering-wheel, on my cheek the parching wind of an August noon, as passenger beside me. You as thou you were. W. H. Auden, "Since".

3 At that time the vegetables called peas were exceedingly scarce, and cost six-and-twenty shillings a quart.

"There are two hundred quarts of peas", said the old fellow, winking with bloodshot eyes, and a laugh that was perfectly frightful. They were consumed with the fragrant ducks; by those who were inclined; or with the venison, which now came in. W. M. Thackeray, "A Dinner in the City, II".

Johanna 116



# Signs of the good life

Norman Bryson

**JACK FLAM**  
*Matisse: The man and his art, 1869-1918*  
 523pp, with 101 colour and 396 black-and-white illustrations. Thames and Hudson. £60. 050091749

These are not good times for Matisse's reputation. If one tries to describe one's general impression of his work, one may end up with something like the following: an art that is brightly coloured, festive, optimistic; shapes which are soothing, harmonious and restful; a sense of protection from whatever is discordant. But one could just as well form this impression from the nursery horses of Franz Marc. We may have to admit that, in terms of the description, Matisse is already deposed and minor.

There are signs that this is so. The inevitable comparison with Picasso - Picasso declared that he and Matisse were "the North and South Poles" - does not favour the latter. It was Picasso rather than Matisse who took Cézanne's break from earlier tradition through to its conclusion in Cubism. Picasso faced up to the major conflicts - artistic, political, spiritual - of his century. Matisse ignored them: in his art, conflict is replaced by interior and domestic harmonies. It is replaced by a hedonism that seems to say: this studio of mine, with its view of the bright yachts and its plants curling round the balcony - this is the good life. Matisse is a long siesta in the South of France, in a house attentive to well-arranged meals, good table linen and luxurious informality. The war of Modernism goes on elsewhere: Matisse is *en vacances*.

In the opening chapter of his fine study, *Matisse: The man and his art, 1869-1918*, Jack Flam briefly tackles the ways in which the early art of Matisse "resists easy or clear categorization", and has "puzzled and annoyed critics since the early years of the century". This book goes a long way towards clarifying and justifying Matisse's goals in painting, but terms like "puzzlement" and "annoyance" may seriously underestimate the negative critical forces working against the artist's reputation. Critical discussion has on the whole served him badly.

In at least two very influential accounts of Modernism, Matisse is the loser. The first, largely American, and associated with Clement Greenberg, claims for Modernism the distinction of rescuing painting from the clutch of Renaissance space and illusionism, and of releasing the potential of the medium itself, expressed in the flatness of the picture plane (from Manet to Cézanne to Jackson Pollock). The essential narrative here tells of the change-over from three dimensions and depth, to two dimensions and flatness, and it is important for the genealogy that Matisse be given a certain development place, *en route* to Abstract Expressionism. Ad Reinhardt listed Matisse's "Open Window" (an atypically flat painting) as one of the two most important artistic events of 1914 (the other being Mondrian's plus and minus pictures).

But Matisse can get the story of triumphant flatness into trouble. The term which the story must at all points repress is decoration: it does no one any good if what is (profoundly) abstract is confused with what is (trivially) decorative. Matisse does not renounce, or sufficiently renounce, the decorative aspect of the picture plane for this particular version of Modernism to seem aptly applicable to him. In *Notes of a Painter* (1908) he states his wish for "an art of balance, of purity and serenity, devoid of troubling or depressing subject matter... a soothing, calming influence on the

mind". This coincides disturbingly with his view of "the duty of the decorator... not to provoke sentiments of fear or enthusiasm, but simply to adorn, to embellish". Between decoration and painting Matisse creates what is - from the point of view of a Clement Greenberg - a scandalous continuity. The patterns on his canvas are even identified with the patterns of decorative objects - a rug, a vase, fabric, wallpaper. By undoing the opposition between "abstraction" and "decoration" on which the narrative of heroic flatness depends, Matisse ends up threatening the story's coherence. And in the idea of Matisse as exalted decorator, the charmingly mindless Matisse is made the scapegoat for the sins of decoration, which the school of thought which would have abstraction triumphant (in 1950, in New York) has had to repress and expel.

The second account in which Matisse loses out is more recent. It is the view which emerges from T. J. Clark's book *The Painting of Modern Life* (1985). In that volume Professor Clark does many important things, and one of them is to shake us out of the habit of thinking that after the decline of academic history painting, French art of the nineteenth century lacks proper iconography. By taking the trouble to notice the content of Impressionism, Clark was able to show that the later iconography was in its own way just as strict and codified as that of the *ancien régime*: the urban promenade, the races, the café and the café-concert, music-halls and *journées de fête*, boating, swimming, the picnic - an iconography of leisure. But a form of painting which sets out merely to record what people do on their day off is not giving itself a particularly engaging or inspiring goal. When pursued exclusively, the cult of "leisure imagery", like the cult of leisure itself, turns its back on whatever discordant realities might threaten the state of *bonheur*. It may become escapist, and narrowly hedonistic. Already in the 1890s Monet was getting rid of the world outside his pleasure garden and painting only lily ponds. Matisse's paintings "Luxe, calme et volupté" (1904-05) and "Bonheur de vivre" (1905-06) push the isolated contemplation of leisure and pleasure still further, into Arcadian fantasy. Such pursuit of pleasure unalloyed is bound to run up against puritanism in the spectator.

Flam underestimates the forces which, in criticism, tend towards the portrayal of Matisse's art as decoration and hedonism. But his book does a great deal to dislodge this negative evaluation, and it does so through two highly effective strategies. The first is to analyse in detail Matisse's relations with the principal movements in French painting during his early career. This historical, and biographical analysis forms the major part of Flam's study, and it is deftly and sensitively carried out. The result is a description of Matisse in terms of his divergences from Impressionism and from Cubism, and the gradual emergence of a distinctive and original vision which is nothing to do with the decorative or the hedonistic. The second strategy is to counter "decoration" and "hedonism" with a quite different term, "feeling". Although it is perhaps more like a leitmotiv than a strategy, Flam's stress on the role of feeling in Matisse avoids the critical fixation on pleasure, and establishes a coherent account of form in Matisse which derives form from emotion, rather than the pursuit of abstraction or of "purely visual" experience. If critical discussion has tended to present Matisse as lightweight, the importance Flam attributes to the role of emotion in the construction of form makes a much more serious claim for his work. What is at stake in his early career, Flam argues, is the discovery of a language the heart can read - the forms of feeling.

For Matisse, feeling is something which cuts across what we see with our eyes, something traversing retinal experience and different from it. It is, in a sense, blind. If one looks around one's room, then closes one's eyes, though nothing is visible, each object - laden with personal associations - remains, rippling through the space in every direction. Unlike the space of retinal experience, where everything is spatially fixed and bounded, this space of feeling and memory is fluid, loose, floating. Once visual detail is scraped away, objects can be edited in scale, shape and colour. They take their fluctuating forms from feeling and from intuition: everything is rearranged (though everything is still familiar).

When Matisse wrote, "I had to invent something that would render the equivalent of my sensation - a kind of communion of feeling between the objects placed in front of me", what he was aiming for was something which would evoke the presence of objects, but not their appearance - the feelings accompanying optical sensation, but not the sensation itself. Success in the evocation of presences depends on finding a means to bracket out optical experience, to silence and pacify the retinal demand. Hence Matisse's early struggle against Impressionism, which Flam chronicles with precision and insight. In the Impressionist image, objects cease to have individual gravity, location and boundary; they become instead inflections in the web of light in a totally luminous field. Impressionism destroys the solidity of the object - the kind of presence on which "feeling" depends. In Fauvism Matisse discovered a way of bypassing the Impressionist retina through the simple (and devastating) device of estranging the entire colour field. When the sky is red and skin is blue, image is no longer interpreted or read against immediate optical experience. Distortion of colour protects the image from confiscation by the empirical senses. And once the image is no longer referred to the retina, it can enter the other domain - Matisse's domain, of presences achieved through scraping away the optical detail, and forms shaped by intentionality and feeling.

French painting in the period covered by Flam's book is dominated by two events: the decline of Impressionism and the rise of Cubism. If Matisse escaped Impressionism joyously, his relation to Cubism was more complicated. It is a striking feature of late nineteenth-century French painting that outbursts of pure sensation or pure feeling do not last for long. The personal, intuitive styles of the Impressionists hardened into the anonymous, scientific style of Signac and Neo-Impressionism; the promenades of Seurat's "La Grande Jatte", who in Renoir or Monet might be simply having a good time, are turned into stiff, hieratic puppets. Fauvism between 1904 and 1908 is another such upsurge, but by 1910 it is all over: Cubism moves in to subject the visual field to geometry, analysis, rigour.

In the years from 1905 to 1910 Matisse was at the forefront of innovation, the uncrowned king of the Fauves. After 1910 the cutting edge of the avant-garde passes to the Cubists and Picasso (relations between them were difficult), and Fauvism is finished. Matisse appears to have responded to this reversal with a mixture of horror and homework. He is often away from Paris - the centre of the hostilities. He travels to Russia and North Africa - a prudent move, since the canvases he exhibited in Paris on his return could be presented as exotic, outside the mainstream, not in the same competition as Cubist work. At the same time he starts experimenting with fragmentary portrait heads, shattering planes and cross-cross angles, worried nods in the direction of Cubism which unfortunately only show how unable he was to assimilate the Cubist style. Superficially, the problem was that a visual vocabulary based on arabesques could not find room for Cubism's brokenness and angularity. More deeply, the problem was that Cubism fundamentally rejected the principles on which Matisse's art was based.

At the most profound level, the divide between the Cubists and Matisse is over the nature of vision, and the kind of subjectivity which inhabits it. Vision in Cubist imagery is not at all unitary: Cubism's fragmented views do not cohere into a concerted whole, and

jumping from perch to perch. But vision in Matisse is resolutely unified and complete. The welter of sensations is sifted for its more permanent outlines, outlines that will serve to express feeling; and the feelings are also sifted through, and the negative emotions taken out, leaving only tranquillity behind. Vision is associated here with emotional pacification, a serenity which shelters the subject from disunity and conflict. Finding a point of unity in subjectivity is Matisse's goal. Cubism uses the metaphor of jumping, intermittent vision to portray the subject as broken and divided. Matisse rejects this fragmented vision in order to move towards a state of calm where the subject can experience pure feeling and its own potential for unity.

What emerges from Flam's book is that the real issues in Matisse are not the status of decoration or *luxe*, but the nature of subjectivity and the role of feeling. Leaving aside the question of which version of the self - the one in Cubism or the one in Matisse - might be closer to the truth, the strength in Matisse's preference for unity must be the feeling of metaphysical connectedness between self and world we see everywhere in his work. Matisse dives into unity the forms of human and vegetal life (the *femme-fleur*), and makes little distinction between animate and inanimate, or even between real and represented (in much of Matisse one finds sculptures and pictures, within the picture). Different levels of being are reconciled, and one has to acknowledge the generosity of feeling which can be so inclusive and all-embracing. But the weakness in Matisse's stance is that such refusal of distinction (between persons and things, or objects and representations) can also seem bovine. Everything is becalmed and enchanted. If there were signs that conflict and dissonance were being converted into peace and tranquillity by meditative labour, we might feel Matisse to have a more complete kind of consciousness than we do. As it is, the calm is a *donnée*, a precondition of the image rather than its fruit.

There is another limitation, which stems from "seeing it feelingly". A painter who is capable of evoking intense emotion is *Brandt*. He gives us the whole experience: the optical field, as well as the feelings which run across it. But Matisse, who starts off by bracketing out what is optical, so showing only the forms of feeling, is unable to represent vision shot through, or swept, or heightened by feeling. From one point of view, the work of Matisse is absolute proof of the role played by feeling in visual life. But the proof can only be presented by cordoning the image off from retinal experience - Matisse, as Flam shows, only came to be Matisse when he had devised ways of protecting his imagination and his paintings from the clutch of his sensations. In doing this he loses the capacity to persuade us that what he paints connects with our normal world. One can concede to Matisse that emotions have their shapes, and that painting can inscribe itself in a language the heart can read, and yet absolutely fail to take the point that these emotions and their signs refer to the ordinary experience of a sighted being living in this world. The forms do not connect, as they can in Rembrandt, with regular vision - they are too far removed for that. So, despite Flam's excellent defence, it seems likely that Matisse will, in the end, be given only a marginal place in the history of modern art: he will increasingly be seen as decorator and hedonist.

Flam's *Matisse*, however, contains much insight and valuable analysis (as well as superb reproductions). It will replace Alfred H. Barr's *Matisse, His Art and his Public* (1951) as the essential monograph in English for the painter's early career. The book takes us only to 1918, but Matisse's art continued to develop right up until his death in 1954. One hopes that Jack Flam is already at work on Volume Two.

A new edition of Berthe Morisot's letters, first collected by her grandson Denis Rouart and translated into English more than thirty years ago, has recently been published (*The Correspondence of Berthe Morisot*, 246pp, Cambridge Press, Paperback, £6.95, 0 521 481 08 6). The letters, which have been published in French by Jean Adler and Tamar Grab provide an interesting and often amusing insight into the artist's life and work. They offer a telling contrast to the idealized representation of Morisot which so many accounts of her construct.

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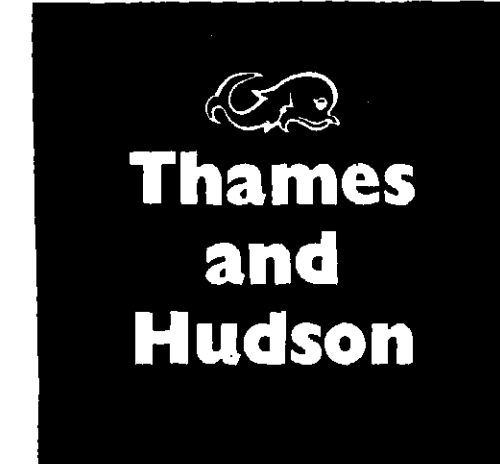
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University of Chicago Press. £23.50 each

Clement Greenberg, who is seventy-seven this year, was brought up in the Bronx and Brooklyn in a socialist, Yiddish-speaking family: his parents had come to America from the Lithuanian Jewish enclave in north-eastern Poland. At four or five years old he was an artistic prodigy, for he could draw "photographically". Any person with such a gift has, of course, much to learn and to unlearn about art. In his teens Greenberg attended classes at the Art Students' League, but something held him back from becoming a full-time painter. At Syracuse University he seems to have realized that he would be (as his father probably wished) an intellectual. As things turned out he made himself into an intellectual of a special type, an art critic.

Greenberg did not begin to publish until 1939, when he was thirty. Given the authority and depth of reading that were displayed when he first appeared in the pages of *Partisan Review*, his later statements that he "educated himself in public" seem over-apologetic. He had spent years in study. While working as a clerk in the US customs, a post that allowed him plenty of free time, he learnt German and Italian, continued to paint, read Marx and began taking the extensive notes which were the basis for his first essays, on Brecht and "Avant-Garde and Kitsch"; this latter, about six thousand words long, was three or four years in the making. Greenberg had probably already defined his politics as Trotskyite when he made his first significant artistic friendships. From about 1936, on Eighth Street between Fourth and Sixth Avenues, there was a small community of painters that included Willem de Kooning, Arshile Gorky and Lee Krasner, who would later marry Jackson Pollock. But radical politics were assumed rather than pursued in this group. All its members had turned away from the provincial social realism that had recently dominated American painting. Nor were they so concerned with art-politics as were some others: the uptown galleries, even including the Museum of Modern Art, seemed to belong to an utterly remote establishment. Living from hand to mouth, not even dreaming of success, they perhaps formed the last truly creative bohemia. In these earliest days of Abstract Expressionism, Greenberg found himself among the avant-garde. He was surrounded by artists who had a better grasp of the issues of twentieth-century painting than anyone in Paris. In the late 1930s "Matisse, Klee, Miro and the early Kandinsky were being taken more seriously on Eighth Street than anywhere else", he recalled. "A handful



Hans Hofmann's "Spring" is reproduced from Frank Stella's Working Space, reviewed on page 311.

of then obscure New York painters possessed the ripest painting culture of the day."

This was not an overstatement; and the obvious significance of this collection is that it traces the concerns of the New York school, from obscurity to dominance. In these two volumes (two more are to follow, bringing Greenberg's criticism up to 1969) are 121 essays and reviews, contributed to *Partisan Review*, the *Nation*, *Commentary* and other journals. They discuss exhibitions by contemporary Americans and the old modern masters of twentieth-century art. Their clarity, honesty and aesthetic sense are all remarkable. They have a permanent value as documents of the period, and they ought also to stimulate anyone who wishes to write well about art. Yet the study of the early New York school is not much pursued, even in America, and one cannot feel that John O'Brian has been inspired by the material he has collected. His introduction is perfunctory and the annotation is so meagre as scarcely to exist. I had the paradoxical impression that the history of art at this crucial time is slipping away from us, not being recovered. Why, for instance – to take one of the first problems raised by these books – does no one really examine the question of the influence of Hans Hofmann on Greenberg and on art generally? All the text-books tell us that the German artist was an important link between European and American painting. He brought a lifetime of experience to the artists who gathered round his little school on Eighth Street, for he had known early modern art both in his native Munich and in Paris – where, as early as 1904, he had drawn side by side with Matisse. He could speak authoritatively, from personal knowledge, of Kandinsky, Delaunay, Picasso. The word "speak", however, indicates our difficulties. As so often with legendary teachers, it is hard to pin down what Hofmann actually taught. His writings are opaque, and we know that there were language problems.

Lee Krasner, a former pupil, recalled that Hofmann was unintelligible and that his instructions had to be translated; presumably they were interpreted in the course of translation. Perhaps, with his knowledge of German, Greenberg was better placed than others to absorb Hofmann's thinking? But still there are difficulties for the historian. It seems that Hofmann's own paintings – which would have clarified his conversation – were not shown to his pupils, and he did not have a one-man show until 1944. Hofmann is acknowledged in "Avant-Garde and Kitsch"; but Greenberg did not attend his school, though he heard some of his impromptu lectures. None the less, it is likely that Greenberg's criticism, with its emphasis on the inspiration that the true painter will find in his medium, took many of its principles from Hofmann, as surely we find in the magnificent, rather stern essay on Klee published in 1941. This is deliberately not an obituary (dutiful commemorative writing is uncongenial to Greenberg); we might read it as Greenberg's decision in a dispute between the differing nature of Klee's painting and Hofmann's. To insist on the medium is also to insist on experience. Greenberg's early criticism is full of desire for the eye's knowledge of art. Here is one reason why his attitudes, now more fully revealed, are less theoretical than is sometimes imagined. Hofmann's teaching, forward-looking and creative, is implicitly compared with the theories of Mondrian, also in New York in the war years. Greenberg disliked "any sort of dogmatic prescription in art" and the way that Mondrian "attempts to elevate as the goal of the total historical development of art what is after all only a time-circumscribed style".

Greenberg's socialism and undefined literary ambitions led to the period 1941-3, when he was an editor of *Partisan Review*. Historians of "literary Trotskyism" are numerous enough; but when they discuss the magazine's combination of revolutionary politics and the avant-garde they do not say much about visual art. Greenberg would not allow political thought to affect his value-judgments before pictures. But his attitudes belong to the age. There is an internationalism to Greenberg's thinking, before he gave up calling himself a Marxist in 1947; that is not quite covered in these volumes. O'Brian does not reprint Greenberg's "L'Art américain au XXe siècle", published in *Les Temps Modernes* of August 1946, on the grounds that the English original has been lost. If we are to have Greenberg whole, we will have him in French if necessary. I also regret the absence of his interview with Ignazio Silone, whom he sought out in his Swiss exile. Only twelve years before Greenberg met him, the Italian communist had witnessed the conflict between Stalin and Trotsky at the Communist International of 1927. How much effect, or how little, would such an encounter have had on the New Yorker's views on modern art? A theme of Greenberg's early writing is the disappearance of folk and peasant art in the new dispensations of capitalism and Stalinist Russia. This had been not only a condition of artists' lives, as they came to Paris and, later, to New York; it was often

enough, just as they joined the avant-garde, a theme of their painting – as it was of Silone's writing. "Avant-Garde and Kitsch" is a Trotskyist essay: it is quite near to the manifesto "Towards a Free Revolutionary Art" the Trotsky approved, and conceivably wrote. In *Partisan Review* in 1938. Greenberg's essay is more subtle than a manifesto. It is Marxist in the sense that it could not have been written without knowledge of Marx. But it is aesthetic, concerned with a "high brow" culture threatened by the "middlebrow" – an obsessive theme in *Partisan Review*, and all Greenberg's writing, Marxist or otherwise, since that day.

The contention that "the avant-garde faces the only living culture we now have" gives an especial edge to Greenberg's comments on writing. Many of the essays in *Perceptions and Judgements* are on literary topics. Greenberg was himself a poet, though unpublished, and (quite apart from caring about his own sentences) he had the conscientious regard for other people's expression that we sometimes find in good translators. His reactions to new literature are, however, the record of an increasing exasperation. Greenberg looked on poetry in vain, if he looked for a sense of purpose and large cultural engagement. The critic-poets R. P. Blackmur and Randall Jarrell could provide no such thing. Marianne Moore and (especially) the well-regarded Robinson Jeffers could not comprehend that poetry might be subject to such demands. Other verse was content in its dependence on Auden, Yeats, Stevens. And it is a fact that poetry of the time, not to speak of later times, proceeded in happy measure towards its self-satisfaction. At this point in Greenberg's reviewing the books should be read through: they have a progressive and cumulative meaning. The present writer began to hear a familiar voice. Greenberg, chiding the poets, was quietly them in just the way that artists speak to each other, when annoyed with their own or each others' frustration. Greenberg surely felt the poetry had become provincial, in a way that painting was not. Quite soon, he returned to Eighth Street and to art life.

This turning away from poetry has more than a local or personal importance. We should see Greenberg's disappointment as part of the separation of art from literature that began in the nineteenth century and is now, for good or ill, effectively complete. Those who make low or study literature find little of interest in those of us who have comparable professional interests in art. Literary people are unable to discuss this division. Perhaps this helps to explain the neglect of *Art and Culture*, the collection of essays Greenberg published in 1960. This unobtainable book – one sometimes sees a copy in an artist's studio – is the best single work of modern art criticism, and has an importance beyond art. Yet its reputation extends beyond the circle of Greenberg's friends. Those who read *Art and Culture* have the opportunity to compare its content with the raw material for the book, for it was fashioned from the essays in O'Brian's collection. "Avant-Garde and Kitsch" was too much of its time and place to be revised, but most of the other essays were rewritten to some extent, even transformed. As one would expect, Greenberg wished to modify some earlier judgments in the light of works he had not previously seen. The tracking of such matters may be left to the bored people who produce the "history of taste". I am interested in the relation of *Art and Culture* to literature, in removing his essays from the context of polemical reviewing, continuing debates, and "readables". Greenberg formed a style for his own time, that made his vernacular much more weighty yet still close to speech. I conjecture that he was so by thinking of lectures, and that he was affected by the example of T. S. Eliot's *Selected Essays*, which characteristically came in the form of a lecture, and was itself a wiser recognition of previous experience and writing.

This is only one way in which *Art and Culture* is a response to Eliot, who (named by Pollock) considered in a number of these early essays. By 1943 or 1944 Greenberg had reached the Parisian art world, and his own New York contemporaries, the highest aspirations for their painting, complementary ambitions for his own writing, Greenberg's general belief was that the

was "the best of all critics". He thought that, long after his poetry entered its decline, his criticism still had life. In 1944, however, there was the problem of the unacceptable *Notes Towards the Definition of Culture*. In England, we tend to think of Eliot's *Notes* in terms of Anglicanism, and as part of the compilation in which some of the book appeared, *Prospect for Christendom*. However (Eliot's preface fails to tell us this), parts of the *Notes* had already appeared in *Partisan Review*. It may seem incongruous that Eliot's manuscript should have been sent to the bourbon-drinking Trotskyite Jewish highbrows of the New York avant-garde. Yet, in truth, where would he have found a better audience? At the end of the Second World War there were many discussions about the preservation and regeneration of culture. Where else but in New York did they amount to more than sentimentalism, goodwill or covert Stalinism? Greenberg replied, in a most typical *Partisan Review* judgment:

There will soon be little diversity of Cultures for Mr Eliot's common religious faith to unify. There will be just greater and lesser degrees of backwardness; and the unifying agents will be movies, comic books, Tin Pan Alley, the Luce publications (with editions in all languages), Coca Cola, rayon stockings, class inaccess, and a common boss. These are all quite compatible, incidentally, with religion, but not at all with socialism.

Towards the end of *Art and Culture* Greenberg remarks that "some day it will have to be told how 'anti-Stalinism', which started out more or less as 'Trotskyism', turned into art for art's sake...". The sooner this is done the

better, in my view. Greenberg's abandonment of socialism was a common experience of his generation. His experience of art has been unique, and should be treasured in some way. "The history of Greenberg's advocacy of Pollock and other Abstract Expressionists is well rehearsed", O'Brian writes. It is true, in a mechanical sense, that such books as Irving Sandler's *The Triumph of American Painting* have made use of periodical files to trace, for instance, Greenberg's public response to Jackson Pollock's series of one-man shows in the 1940s. But the relations between the two men have never been discussed, except in such unprofessional works as John Gruen's *The Party's Over Now* and Barnett Friedman's book about Pollock, perhaps the most vulgar biography of any artist. Greenberg and Pollock were introduced by Lee Krasner in, probably, late 1942. Greenberg reviewed Pollock's first solo exhibition of 1943 with held-back encouragement, as it might have seemed to the artist. The two men did not become close friends until, a year later, Greenberg was overwhelmed – convinced, I should say – by the "portable mural" Pollock painted for Peggy Guggenheim which is now in the collection of the University of Iowa. However, as we may now see more clearly, many characteristics of Pollock's art ran in a contrary direction to the general impetus of Greenberg's writing. In a way Greenberg considered provincial, Pollock was too "gothic" and uncouth. He had far less appreciation for Matisse than had Greenberg: he followed Picasso of the 1930s, while Greenberg believed that Picasso's later art – and "Guernica" in particular, a painting that

which he himself did much to foster). One learns, for instance, how carefully he selected the viewpoint for each picture; how attentive he was to the composition of his images, to the abstract surface patterns of shape, colour and brushwork, even to the position and hue of his signature. One also learns with what increasing regularity Monet made use of the studio to touch up and rework pictures painted largely out of doors weeks, months, even years before, as he struggled to reconcile his professed goal of truth to fleeting natural appearances with his increasingly fastidious sense of the demands of picture-making. It is not that all this material is entirely new, but that House has investigated it far more thoroughly and more perceptively than any previous writer.

There is also, of course, the crucial question of the character of the artist's vision. And in the case of a landscape painter like Monet there is the question of the meanings that nature held for him, and whether those meanings changed. On these issues House is less revealing. In looking so closely at the detail of Monet's paintings he has sometimes overlooked their total impact. In attempting to be an unprejudiced and reliable witness, he has achieved a prose which, although admirably lucid and jargon-free, is too plain and too evenly paced to reflect the surprising and exciting emotional variety of the works themselves, which at Belle-Ile and Antibes in the 1880s, for example are quite as intensely expressive as Van Gogh's at Arles. Little sense of Monet's personality and taste emerges, not just because House gives no space to anecdote – the biographical chapter is perfunctory – but because he seems here to be suspicious of interpretative criticism as such.

One would have liked more recognition and penetration of the mood of individual paintings; more committed discussion of the many parallels with Romanticism and Symbolism; more consideration of the significance of the handful of motifs which entirely occupied Monet during the last thirty-five years of his life. Didn't the pool of water-lilies, for example, come to mean something particular to the ageing and by now reclusive painter, enough to make it seem to him a subject worthy of the most grandiose – the only truly public – project he ever undertook? In John House's book these kinds of question are occasionally raised, but too tentatively, as if they were not, as in reality they are, central to the whole absorbing story of Monet's transformation of nature into art.

## A calculated spontaneity

Elizabeth Cowling

JOHN HOUSE

Monet: Nature into Art

260pp, with 118 colour and 180 black-and-white illustrations

Yale University Press. £19.95.

030037856

There have been too few detailed and fully documented accounts of the working methods of great artists. So this new close-up study of Monet's evolving practice is most welcome. John House has been scanning the surfaces of Monet's paintings for many years. He has tracked down and examined hundreds of them, counting the layers of paint, gauging whether they were laid wet on wet or wet on dry, checking the colour of the priming, measuring the degree of impasto, analysing the shape, size, weight and direction of the brushmarks, detecting obliterated paintings underneath, and noting the *pentimenti* – he has a whole fascinating chapter on this topic usually considered irrelevant to Impressionism. To this wealth of evidence from the paintings themselves – judiciously assessed, taking into account the distorting effects of gallery lighting, wall-colour, and framing, as well, of course, as the passage of time – House has added the no less essential, if less reliable, evidence of Monet's letters, his dealer's records, photographs of his studios, contemporary witness accounts and journalistic criticism, and set all this in the context of period manuals on painting technique and the practice of Monet's predecessors and Impressionist associates. The scholarship, in short, is meticulous as the looking, and the making of the pictures comes vividly to life. In a book written from this perspective the illustrations are, of course, all-important. The allowance is generous: many of the plates and details in excellently reproduced colour, and by no means all of them of the familiar favourites. The structure of House's argument is straightforward and methodical. Most of the chapters are devoted to different aspects of Monet's technique and practice, but because they are organized in terms of a simple chronological progression a sense of his development is gradually established. House's basic thesis – compellingly argued – is that the painter's "spontaneity" is largely illusory, that Monet was an entirely calculating "artist", not by any means that innocently objective, if not calculating, "eye" of popular myth (a myth

gripped Pollock – was weaker than his Cubism. Yet, as Pollock moved towards his supreme pictures of 1947-50, there had arisen some continuity of purpose between himself and the critic. We would be foolish to believe that they had been blown closer together by some beneficent wind of the *Zeitgeist*. The printed reviews of Pollock's exhibitions can represent only the smallest, most official part of what went on in their discussions. Greenberg is unique among the classic art critics in that his conversation in the studio is more important, often, than his writing. Was he urging Pollock on? Maybe, but the painter's eye was "in front" of Greenberg's at times. Krasner too taught Greenberg visually. All this is the more mysterious when we see the paintings. The question of pictorial influence seems swept away by the extraordinary invention of Pollock's all-over, poured-and-splattered paintings – as though they were without precedent, though of course that could not be the case. Art historians tread carefully when they write of the background of Pollock's 1947-50 dripped pictures, especially when they confront Greenberg's statement that the style

really took up Analytical Cubism from the point at which Picasso and Braque had left it when, in their collages of 1912 and 1913, they drew back from the utter abstractness to which Analytical Cubism seemed headed. There is a curious logic in the fact that it was only at this point in his own stylistic evolution that Pollock himself became consistently and utterly abstract. . . .

This, from the essay "American-type Painting", comes from the version of that piece rewritten in 1958, after Pollock's cruel, banal death in a car crash. The original essay was written before Pollock died: in it we read that "Analytical Cubism is always on [Pollock's] mind". Perhaps that was because Greenberg

was so often talking about it? I think we are here in a tender area between studio conversation, printed accounts of the current state of American art, and retrospective judgment.

A feature of Greenberg's criticism, on paper or in the studio, is the way it takes a broad look at a development in modern art, then uses this perspective for a sudden focus on a specific problem in a new painting. Perhaps the approach was derived from Hofmann. Perhaps Greenberg's teleological impulse (so evident in the very early piece "Towards a New Laocoon") has a base in Marxism. The fact remains that the whole bias of his career has been towards the creation of works of art, not their interpretation. He has written least about the artists who have been closest to him. Greenberg had decisive personal relations with Jackson Pollock, David Smith, and others of the first Abstract Expressionist generation; and subsequently with Helen Frankenthaler, Kenneth Noland, Morris Louis, Jules Olitski and Anthony Caro. It is high time that some responsible Greenberg studies began: here could be a place to start. The persistent call, in Greenberg's early writings, for a "high style", might have been answered in these artists. But that can be only part of the story, if indeed it is true. Art critics are sometimes praised, as Ruskin and Fry were, for having "taught a generation to see", or some such phrase. Greenberg's case is quite different. He has been concerned with maintaining high quality in art over a succession of generations, and in the face of much opposition. I doubt if Greenberg believes in the "triumph" of American art generally. The best paintings of Abstract Expressionism were not created to lead the way for Pop Art. In Eliot's formulation: just as there are no lost causes, so also are there no gained ones.

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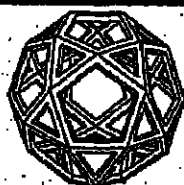
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# Master of the intimate

Nicholas Penny

FIORILLA RICCHIA SANTORO

Antonello e l'Europa  
204pp with 98 colour and black-and-white  
illustrations. Milan: Jaca. L.85.000.  
88 16 60068

We peep at Antonello da Messina's St Jerome through a feigned stone window frame. He is busy at his books, with an inkpot, a pet cat and a pair of potted plants, on a sort of wooden island – an odd structure, of a plain, if neat, style of carpentry, more like a pantry than a study – within a quasi-ecclesiastical building; through it, at the other side, we can see a delightful landscape. Few paintings in the National Gallery are more charming. And none is more fascinating for the historian of Renaissance art.

Antonello's "St Jerome" is perhaps the most remarkable of all imitations of a Flemish style and subject by an Italian artist of the fifteenth century (and has, in consequence, been mis-attributed sporadically since the early sixteenth century). It also seems, in an entirely undocumetary spirit, to have been created out of a desire to illustrate some of the new ambitions of the art – most obviously the idea of the painting as a window. Light is recorded as something entering the room – that is almost to say the picture – both from the window through which one looks in and from the windows opposite; it is reflected on the tiled floor and silhouettes the tame lion who, alert to our presence before his master, strolls towards us. An equal emphasis is given to linear and to aerial perspective. The traditional way of emphasizing the former was to paint a chequer-board floor, but these tiles, as Fiorella Ricchia Santoro observes in *Antonello e l'Europa*, are decorated with a design which, as it recedes, becomes illegible. It is the sort of thing about which Leonardo made notes.

Antonello's painting was by no means always charming. His head-and-shoulder por-

traits of men – the man with the scarred lip in the Louvre, for example, or the man in a red cap in the National Gallery – impart such a forceful personality, such a vigilant presence, that one would feel uncomfortable to be left alone with them. Here Flemish specificity is qualified by an Italian monumentality of form and by a related fascination with pictorial geometry – the bright edges of the narrow band of shirt escaping from the tight-necked tunic of the man in a red cap represents, as Dr Santoro observes, a most sophisticated perspectival exercise.

Closely related to these portraits are Antonello's intimate devotional paintings – "close-ups" of the man of sorrows, of the Redeemer blessing and, most enthralling in its narrative implications, of the Virgin Annunciate who acknowledges us as if we were the Angel. (The narrative had, in fact, long been divided into two images in polyptyches and across the arches of churches.)

Antonello's geometric concerns were inseparable from the power which these images possessed. The foreshortened gesture of Christ blessing, in the National Gallery, as is evident from careful examination of the paint surface and very clear in the infra-red reflectogram which Santoro illustrates, was repainted by him, not only to get it right, but to make it more direct, more vivid, more uncannily real in its apparent penetration of the front plane of the picture. The way that the vertical formed by the projecting corner of the table in the centre of the lower part of the painting of the Virgin Annunciate in Palermo is rediscovered in the central fold of the mantle above, contributes, inculcably, to the rigid stillness of the painting, and this makes the action of the hand more eloquent.

For the art historian, the few surviving works of Antonello give him enormous stature, comparable with that of Van Eyck and Piero della Francesca, by both of whom he was influenced, as only another genius could have been. His stature is comparable too with that of Giovanni Bellini, upon whom he had, during a brief stay

in Venice, a crucial impact, chiefly because of one great alterpiece, which was sent in fragments to the court of Charles I in the early seventeenth century. The remains of this painting reveal that, as well as being a master of the most intimate types of painting, he was capable of the grandest pictorial architecture.

A monograph on Antonello with a catalogue of his paintings is therefore a matter of considerable importance and this one is very welcome. It is up to date, imaginative and careful in discussing the sources of his art (a great deal of space is given to intelligent speculation about what he might have seen in his early years in Naples), sensitive to quality, alert to stylistic affiliations (the "eco pierfrancescana" here, the "revival eckiano" there) and judicious in discussing problems of dating. There is, however, less than we might expect on the artist's techniques and on his subject-matter (there is nothing, for instance, on the significance of the saints chosen for the Venetian altarpieces). As in the catalogue of the 1981 exhibition on the artist in Messina, to which the author contributed, there is a valuable appendix of documents; but, unlike that catalogue, this book has no index, and the colour plates are bunched, rather than conveniently integrated with the text.

## Imaginary gardens, real toads

Suzanne B. Butters

MANFRED LEITHE-JASPER

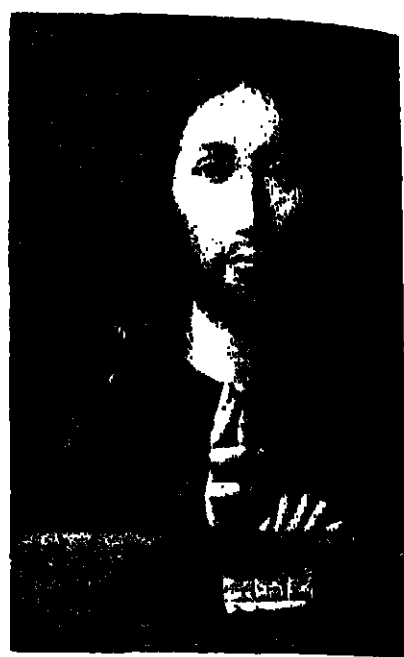
Renaissance Master Bronzes from the  
Collection of the Kunsthistorisches Museum,  
Vienna

Translated by P. S. Falla  
304pp with 80 colour and 20 black-and-white  
illustrations. Scala.  
Distributed by Philip Wilson. £19.95.  
085667 2270

Giambologna used to complain that, although God had created him to make colossal sculptures and great contrivances, Grand Duke Francesco, because of the needs which arose, continuously used him to make small birds, little fish, lizards, and other tiny animals, but that Grand Duke Ferdinando had freed him from that tedious, and kept him busy making the most noble equestrian statue of the most noble prince, Grand Duke Cosimo, his father.

Reported by Scipione Ammirato in his commentary on Tacitus (Florence, 1594), Giambologna's lament, however tendentious, still communicates the real ambivalence which many sixteenth-century sculptors felt about making works whose content was zoologically and morally base. The cast from life of a crab, to be used as a trinket box for some unidentified sixteenth-century Canerian, typifies the area of bronze production which Giambologna claimed to find tedious, and is just one of many examples of animal subjects which are represented in this catalogue of works selected from one of the world's greatest collections of Renaissance bronzes. In his introduction to *Renaissance Master Bronzes from the Collection of the Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna*, Douglas Lewis shows that his sympathies are with these disturbingly real toads and crustacea, the production of which he firmly associates with those systematic late Renaissance collections of curiosities housed in *Wunderkammern*, thereby neglecting the great stimulus to animal sculpture of all sizes provided by Hellenistic works, both extant and as known through literary descriptions.

The strong attachment on the part of Renaissance sculptors to antiquity also tends to blur the distinction Giambologna drew between the degree of professional prestige attached to working on the small and the large scale. As is made clear in this catalogue, many Italian sculptors exploited the diminutive scale of bronze statuettes and small reliefs in order to carry on an erudite dialogue with the monumental remains of classical sculpture, and even assumed nicknames, like "Antico" and "Moderno", to reflect their allegiances. Some proposed miniaturized reconstructions of famous damaged works, like the "Hercules and Antaeus" from the Vatican Belvedere, sketched at the time to Polyclitus. Others copied notable antique groups, like the "Boy with a Goose" by Boethius of Chalcidion, by means of which not just the technical abilities



Antonello da Messina's "Salvatore Mundi", 1498, reproduced from Michael Levey's *The Psychology of Perspective and Renaissance Art* (1979). Cambridge University Press. £27.50. 0521 25376-4.

and good taste of the copyist could be made known, but also the formal qualities and iconographic details of the classical original related to a wider audience. Still others created new works *all'antica*, in the ancient manner adapting the imagery and formal repertory of antiquity to the sorts of objects required by humanist patrons in the Renaissance. B. satyr-lamps and domestic fountains or wells in the guise of Tritons. In these and other ways, many designers of Renaissance bronzes seized the opportunity to imprint the spirit of the grand on the matter of the small, in the knowledge that the most revered classical sculptors had preceded them: as Statius wrote on seeing a statuette of "Hercules resting on his Labours" by Lysippus, "what precious touch, what daring imagination the master had, at once to model an ornament of the table and to conceive in his mind night colossal forms" – a comment rightly given prominence by Lewis.

Manfred Leithe-Jasper, to whom we owe not only the catalogue which forms the basis of this book, but also an opening essay on the history of Renaissance bronzes and the history of the Habsburg-dominated collection in Vienna, approaches the complexities of the subjects with great subtlety, providing an impressive range of overlapping interpretations, whether of subject-matter, historical context or formal stimulus. In fact, Dr Leithe-Jasper's catalogue could serve to orient anyone new to this specialized field of Renaissance sculpture in the issues which characterize it. With this author, one can learn how to observe the technical niceties of bronze casting, finishing and patination; explore the range of aesthetic effects which this influence and flexible genre permitted; and enter the labyrinth of attribution problems which necessarily surrounds small bronzes through literary descriptions.

The book is beautifully produced. Its margins, designed to accommodate a bibliography and citations from inventories which otherwise might be thought wasteful space, serve well to set off the high-quality colour photographs of each bronze, a format for suggesting the physical nature of these intimate works, which, more often than not, were decontextualized in design and in the display of these plates and the accompanying text. The beauty of these plates and the ingenuity of Leithe-Jasper's accompanying text should make this book valuable to collectors, students and serious scholars alike.

## Dramatically full of figures

David Rosand

MICHAEL LEVEY

Giambattista Tiepolo: His life and art  
302pp, 80 colour and 160 black-and-white  
illustrations. Yale University Press. £45.  
030030185  
ADELHEID M. GALT  
Domenico Tiepolo: The Punctinello drawings  
197pp, 77 colour and 27 black-and-white  
illustrations. British Museum Publications.  
£30.  
07141 16335

The prejudice of historical vision is a powerful barrier to aesthetic perception, and perhaps no major artist has suffered from it as much as Giambattista Tiepolo. He was the most successful Venetian painter of the eighteenth century, celebrated throughout Europe, but his epoch, although acknowledged a "silver age" of Venetian painting, has been dismissed as the decadent carnival years of a once noble and thriving tradition. Tiepolo's art – magnificent and celebratory, grand in scale and heroic in its aspirations – has not escaped the stigma of decline. The grandiloquent rhetoric of his imagery, its implausible reiteration of warmed-over mythologies, its panegyric service to a dying politics and a defensive church, seem hopelessly ancient *regime*, resisting all that one considers positive in that enlightened age. The politics of judgment blinds one to the quality of a great artist's achievement, for the sheer ambition of Tiepolo's heavens distinguishes an art of genuinely high purpose and noble sentiment – if only one can respond in the right way. To instruct us in such response is the high purpose of Michael Levey's passionate monograph.

The recently retired director of the National Gallery has long been known as a most sympathetic and persuasive interpreter of eighteenth-century art. His *Painting in Eighteenth-Century Venice* (1959, reissued in 1980) adumbrates the larger picture of Tiepolo's world, and his *Rococo to Revolution* (first published in 1966) offered on a still larger canvas a rich synthesis of the art of the period. Returning now to focus on the painter who has always been at the centre of his interests, Sir Michael has written a study in which Tiepolo emerges as a master decorator of profound affect – very much like the Venetian painter of the "golden age" who served as his pictorial muse, Paolo Veronese, and whose "Family of Darius before Alexander" (in the National Gallery) represented a very special and constant source of inspiration for him.

Tiepolo was the last, and arguably the greatest, of the masters of fresco decoration in the grand Italian tradition. Painters in that tradition – since Giotto but especially from Correggio to Luca Giordano – had deliberately and programmatically challenged the opacity of the plaster surface on which they worked; opening walls, ceilings, and domes to worlds beyond, their painting affirmed the very existence of a heaven above. Whether the celestial setting was pagan or Christian hardly mattered; the mechanics of presentation and the resulting illusion remained the same. To extend such pictorial affirmation into the age of reason was Tiepolo's apparently anachronistic artistic charge.

The task that Levey has set himself is to read behind the mask and gesture of the artist's style to the passion that animates his creatures, to introduce us to Tiepolo the dramatic painter. Structuring his text around individual pictures and decorative cycles – the great projects in Venice and the Veneto, Udine, Milan, Würzburg, Madrid – Levey weaves a compelling narrative. Biography and history, patronage and sustaining culture enrich and validate his account, but the art itself remains as protagonist. Tiepolo's achievement is measured against those of his contemporaries, and the comparison with Piazzetta in particular provides a point of view that is mutually illuminating. Piazzetta, the highly respected older master, whose deeply grounded painting in oil affords a perfect foil to the *seconda fantasia* of Tiepolo's light in fresco, and whose poverty, which long overshadowed the success of Tiepolo, Levey traces through his text; more than

merely enlivening his account, it enhances the humanity of his subject – and of his treatment.

Precisely in its theatricality, the dimension of Tiepolo's imagination which has proved a stumbling block to modern reception, Levey recognizes the key to understanding this art. Without forcing the analogies, he invokes the world of the eighteenth-century stage and its competing aesthetics – the *commedia dell'arte* and the new comedy of Goldoni, Metastasio and *opera seria*, Da Ponte and Mozart. Such invocation enhances one's sense of the richness of Tiepolo's art and its possibilities. Especially important is the example of *opera seria*, it too an art of strict convention and high ambition. In the tempo and dignity of its personae, Levey finds an appropriate measure of the dramatic grandeur of Tiepolo's stock characters. In his account of the renditions of the Antony and Cleopatra theme he shows that the artist was responsive to the nuances of dialogue and gesture as well as to the larger scenic spectacle. The pages devoted to the frescoes in the Villa Valmarana represent the culmination of Levey's critical apology, the real test of his thesis. Following his reading of these scenes from Homer and Virgil, Ariosto and Tasso, it is clear that Tiepolo was one of the true dramatists of his time. Surely no other artist has so fully realized the potential of ancient Timanthes's composition of the "Sacrifice of Iphigenia". That image, preserved only in literary descriptions, stands as the model of projective aesthetics: the sympathetic viewer supplies the emotions to the hidden features of the grieving Agamemnon. And in the Villa Valmarana one does. Levey's critical presentation is deep and thorough. Following his interpretative descriptions, one is affected by the painter's themes even as one marvels at his technique. In responding to Levey's response one is oneself moved.

*Fantasia* is the word that Francesco Algarotti – Tiepolo's admirer, patron, agent and friend – used to characterize this painter's talents. Conjecturing the obviously exotic nature of Tiepolo's dramatic personae, his apparently indiscriminate mixing of contemporary, classical, and oriental types, the word itself resonates a more fundamental set of values involving a larger range of artistic choices. Tiepolo's imaginative powers are demonstrated not only in the sartorial brilliance of costume, geographical indulgence of setting, and apparent disregard for historical order – in short, his failures of academic decorum. They make the very structure of pictorial composition their ground, the grouping of diverse figures. That *seconda fantasia* represents the culmination of a long Renaissance tradition of invention. At first indebted to the classical literary models that inspired it, the concept of pictorial invention eventually took firm root in the painter's studio. The graphic arts, drawing and printmaking in particular, assumed special privilege as the favoured media for expressing new ideas invented by the creative imagination – a good painter, as Dürer wrote, is "inwardly full of figures" (*inwendig voller Figur*). *Invenzione, capriccio, fantasia, scherzo* – these are terms that come to be shared by the graphic arts with music. In both media they imply a certain poetic freedom of the mind to wander, to create variations on themes of its own making or choosing. Tiepolo's enigmatic etchings, which still challenge interpretation, were called, generically, *capricci* or, a title invented by his son Domenico, *scherzi di fantasia*. Although they represent but a small fraction of the master's creative output, the prints, as declarations of pictorial fantasy, epitomize the essential value of Tiepolo's art, sheer invention.

Domenico Tiepolo enjoyed, or suffered, the reputation of being the "most diligent imitator" of his father; a "closely following, faithful disciple". He was indeed a model of filial piety, constant aide and companion, studio assistant and representative. His reputation has long been clouded by the shadow of his celebrated father, but recently he has begun to emerge as an independent artist. It has become clear that, while building on his father's example, he made his own statement in his own voice. He distinguishes himself from his father above all by a commitment to a certain realism. None the less, perhaps nowhere does he extend the paternal legacy more effectively than in the realm of *fantasia*. Domenico found his thematic challenges not in the distances of imagined



Tiepolo's self-portrait with his son Domenico. A detail from the painter's "Apollo and the Continents" ceiling in the Residenz, Würzburg, taken from Giambattista Tiepolo by Michael Levey, reviewed here.

time or place but rather in the realities of his own century, which he outlived by four years.

Among the facts of his time that he so imaginatively transformed was genre painting itself, especially in a late series of drawings featuring the character of Punctinello. These 104 designs, elaborately executed in pen and wash, he called "Divertimenti per li regozzi", a final declaration (along with Goya's *Caprichos*) of that graphic inventive tradition. These drawings suggest, without ever confirming, a narrative structure built around the life of Punctinello – from cradle, or nest, to gallows, grave, and resurrection. What Domenico has given us, however, is not the single character out of the *commedia dell'arte* but a whole tribe of him. Punctinello, masked and hunchback, has here become everyman; moving in and out of various social orders and situations, he interacts with his brothers, with undeformed humanity, with creatures from the mythological imagination – he is Achilles educated by, but also Deianira abducted by, a centaur, and he is Ganymede carried off by the Olympian eagle. Commenting on the conventions of art as well as life, Domenico's drawings seem to parody the themes and genres of European painting – pastoral and lamentation, the arcadian and the *fête champêtre*, the hunt, the conversation piece, and the quotidian genre of Pietro Longhi. Within this summa of pictorial options there are several studio scenes, in one of which

a Punctinella Alexander awards Campaspe to a Punctinello Apelles; the geste, subject of several paintings by Giambattista, loses none of its magnanimity for the grotesque masks. Indeed, it is precisely the anonymity of the mask and its carnival licence that contribute so poignantly to the ironic power of Domenico's *Divertimenti*. These drawings extend the pathos of those on the margins of society, explored in the *commedia* types by Watteau, towards a level of social chaos and terror that we know best from Goya. The Venetian Republic fell to Napoleonic progress in 1797. Domenico lived another seven years, and any interpretation of his Punctinello series must consider the context of foreign occupation in which they were probably made.

The volume published by the British Museum offers excellent colour facsimiles of seventy-seven of the Punctinello drawings, along with smaller black-and-white illustrations of the others. The project itself developed from an exhibition organized by Adelheid M. Galt in 1979 for the art museums of Indiana University and Stanford University; the catalogue contained an essay and entries by Marcia E. Vetrocq, whose PhD dissertation was on the *Divertimenti*. Unfortunately, that text is not included in the present volume, and readers interested in knowing more about Domenico's inventions will want to turn to the catalogue of the earlier exhibition.

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## Period flavour

### Graham Reynolds

**RICHARD DORMANT**  
*British Painting in the Philadelphia Museum of Art, from the Seventeenth through the Nineteenth Century*  
486pp with 42 colour and 286 black-and-white illustrations. Philadelphia Museum of Art, with Weidenfeld and Nicolson. £35.  
0-297-79005-6

The National Gallery catalogues which Martin Davies wrote or edited after the Second World War set a new standard for thoroughness of documentation of paintings. Richard Dormant has carried this movement towards the provision of yet more information still further. Starting, perhaps reasonably, from the assumption that his readers will be innocent of the most basic knowledge of the artists or their subjects, he provides a monograph about each of the pictures at Philadelphia and their authors. To the customary details about provenance he has added technical notes on the conservation and condition of the paintings. In the course of his researches he has made a number of important additions to our understanding of works in the collection.

He is discussing 130 oil paintings by just over forty artists working in Great Britain. The core of the collection is provided by the forty-two works given by John McFadden, and collected by him between 1893 and 1916. This gift to the city of Philadelphia gave an impetus towards the completion of the Museum of Art. Its content is redolent of the period over which he was collecting and of the source — exclusively Agnew's — from which he obtained it; that is, in common with many other American collections formed then, its main weight lay in the representation of the late eighteenth-century portrait painters, enlivened by some late eighteenth and early nineteenth-century landscapes. The McFadden collection has been enhanced by many more recent gifts, notably that by William L. Elkins, rich in Gainsboroughs, but the flavour of the assemblage has not been radically altered by these later acquisitions.

The collection starts with two seventeenth-century portraits, an early Lely of James Butler, 1st Duke of Ormond, re-attributed from Dobson, and a Kneller of an unidentified soldier. The first real excitement is provided by the two crowd conversation pieces by William Hogarth, "The Assembly at Wanstead House" and "Conversation Piece with Sir Andrew Fountaine". Unravelling the identities of the figures contained in these two pictures, all people of note in their own day, gives Dormant plenty of scope for investigation and conjecture. The three portraits by Reynolds are headed by the "Master Bubbury" which Horace Walpole found charming on its exhibition in 1781. But they are overshadowed by the five portraits by Gainsborough, of which the three-quarter-length "Lady Rodney", McFadden's first serious purchase, is complemented by the bust-length oval of the beautiful "Elizabeth Linley, later Mrs Richard Brinsley Sheridan". To these are adjoined four of his more successful landscapes. By visiting the actual scenes Dormant has been able to establish that the "View near King's Bromley-on-Trent, Staffordshire" was based upon the view from the manor park, thus making it necessary to revise the notion, put about by the artist himself, that he never did landscapes from nature. The largest group is formed by the twelve portraits by Raeburn. By searching the papers of the sitters' descendants the author has been able to establish a tentative chronology for them which greatly assists in the study of Raeburn's development.

The representation of English landscape painting is continued by versions of Wilson's "Lake Avernus" and "Tivoli: Temple of the Sibyl". These pave the way for two early nineteenth-century masterpieces, by Turner and Constable. The more fanatical custodians of our heritage lament that any British paintings should ever have left the country. That this is a short-sighted view can be understood by considering how useful this collection is in demonstrating the individuality of a particular phase of British painting in a place where it is so well cared for and where it has received the intense study embodied in this publication. But it is legitimate to regret that both Turner's oil

paintings of "The Burning of the House of Lords and Commons, 16th July 1834" are in the United States, one in Philadelphia, the other in the Cleveland Museum of Art. They represent a spectacular moment in British national history, the dramatic aspects of which were seized on by Turner to symbolize the passing of an old order. Had the current machinery for reviewing the export of works of art been established in the 1920s, when both these versions were dispatched, it is likely that their sale would have been postponed; though whether the money to prevent their shipment would have been forthcoming is more open to question. In any case the present owners are generous in their reception of requests for loans to important exhibitions.

The recent restoration of Constable's "The Lock" has shown it to be the most brilliant of his full-scale sketches for exhibited pictures. Its make-up provides a history of his creative process fervently at work, since it involved his cutting the canvas at the right and extending its height as he converted his design from a horizontal to a vertical format. More even than the final version it justifies the eulogy passed upon the composition by S. W. Reynolds: "Since the days of Gainsborough and Wilson, no landscape has been painted with so much truth and originality, so much art, so little artifice."

The *Oxford English Dictionary* says that a catalogue is distinguished from a mere list by "alphabetical or other order, and often by the addition of brief particulars". It is apparent that brevity no longer forms part of the definition, and it is to be hoped that the scourge of alphabetical order will soon be banished. Nothing about the content of a collection can be learned from such a sequence as Leighton,

Lely, Linnell and it is surprising that in its publication, so carefully planned and executed, there is no due to the chronological order of the groups of paintings and their artists. Had such a guide been provided, it would have shown how very partial a view of British art the Philadelphia collection provides. There are no British portraits by the bohemian or Van Dyck, no romantic compositions by Fuseli or Martin. The works by nineteenth-century painters are rounded off by the neo-classics Leighton and Alma-Tadema. But the Victorian genre painters, now regarded as embodiments of a truly native art, are only timidly represented by William Maw Egley. More surprisingly, there is not a single Pre-Raphaelite painting; to see examples of the crucial aspect of British art the visitor will have to extend his journey to the Delaware Art Museum in Wilmington.

The late eighteenth-century portraits in Philadelphia do not rival in importance those in the Huntington Art Gallery, and the collection as a whole cannot challenge the width of representation accorded by the Yale Center for British Art. But a catalogue can only deal with the collection presented to him. This is Philadelphia is typical of a particular epoch in taste, the early twentieth century. That was directed away from history and anything towards paintings in which the dominant interest is in the individual person and his or her relationships with other people. It is permeated by the humanity which is such a particular strength of the British novel. By extending much information from these paintings Richard Dormant has emphasized the wide fascination of the confident and urban society which they reflect.

## Treasures of the print room

### David Bindman

ANTONY GRIFFITHS and REGINALD WILLIAMS

*The Department of Prints and Drawings in the British Museum: User's Guide*  
189pp. British Museum Publications. £10.  
07141 16343

For most people the identity of the Prints and Drawings Department of the British Museum is defined by the superlative groups of drawings by the great Western masters like Michelangelo, Raphael and Dürer. But it was never the intention of the founders and early benefactors to collect masterpieces: they believed that they were adding to the national store of knowledge contained in visual images on paper, as a part of the British Museum library. The great collection of 229 Dürer drawings entered the Museum as a single album in the collection of books and manuscripts purchased by Parliament from Sir Hans Sloane in 1753, and the three drawings by Stubbs in the collection were extracted from one of the albums of natural history drawings acquired from Sir Joseph Banks. Only in 1808 was a separate department of Prints and Drawings founded in the Museum, and though it increasingly received bequests from connoisseurs of prints and drawings it continued to accumulate collections of images of all kinds so long as they were on paper, including photographs, fans, bookplates and all kinds of ephemera.

It is a particular virtue of this excellent and much-needed guide that from it one can get a sense of changing attitudes to acquisition over the two centuries of the collection's existence. Such groups as the Sarah Sophie Banks collection of 19,000 pieces of ephemera, the Crace collection of London views, and the immense portrait collection are complemented by other groups of objects acquired mainly in the nineteenth century to help artists. The mysteriously named category "Authorities for Artists", for example, consists of fifteen large boxes of mainly costume prints so that a Victorian painter could ensure that his or her painting of a historical subject was accurate in the minutest detail. The result of such patterns of accumulation has been to make the collection of a awe-inspiring size and of a complexity which defies rational cataloguing.

The first part of the *User's Guide* gives a

detailed account of the cataloguing procedures which will be invaluable for those users who know precisely what they want to see. In practice, however, most users do not come with defined objectives and may easily miss things of interest. Someone working on the French Revolution, for example, may not realize that the Lady Charlotte Schreiber collection of fans, presented in 1891, contains a superb group of fans of Revolutionary scenes. The Department is not the obvious place to look for architectural drawings, although there do happen to be a marvellous working study by Wren for the dome of St Paul's. The solution adopted by Antony Griffiths and Reginald Williams has been to make the second half of the Guide into an alphabetical index to encompass special collections, subject groups, benefactors, particular strengths of the collection and any potentially useful information.

The Topic Index is unexpectedly enlightening to read and can hardly fail to lure a user of the print room into new discoveries. The authors have an excellent eye for human nature and a refreshing candour about the unimpressive nature of the collection. Something of the labour is captured by picking out at random some of the topics: under C, for example, one finds Colour Printing, which draws together notes of the widely scattered material in the Department; Conservation, which indicates the growth of professional care from the days when "the Keeper himself did whatever was necessary"; Captain Cook, which details the departmental holdings from the South Pacific voyages; Costume, and Crace, Frederick, the collector of the volumes of London topography. The wholly unclassifiable group "Arts and Sciences" which contains, among other treasures:

3 programmes of Royal Entertainments performed by Her Majesty's servants at Windsor Castle, 1853 and 1861; a puzzle picture (A View of the Birth of Harlequin, 1770), a sand print (A View of Needles by E. Dove, 1848), an example of paper splitting by W. Baldwin, and a visiting card of Lewis W. Douglas, printed on a tin sheet of Arizona copper.

To celebrate the publication of this guide the Department has put on an exhibition, *Arts and Sciences of the Prints and Drawings Collection* (Room 64, 25 March to 1 April), which broadly follows the Topic Index. It has been selected by Paul Colman and is a sensitive regard for the high and low of the collection.

## The dream of Russian Modernism

### Norbert Lynton

CAMILLA GRAY  
*The Russian Experiment in Art 1863-1922*  
324pp, with 21 colour and 339 black-and-white illustrations. Thames and Hudson. Paperback, £4.95.  
0-500-20207-9

SELIM O. KHAN-MAGOMEDOV  
*Rodchenko: The complete work*  
Edited by Vieri Quilici  
304pp, with 77 colour and 488 black-and-white illustrations. Thames and Hudson. £40.  
0-500-09176-5

Aleksandr Vesnin and Russian Constructivism  
220pp, with colour and black-and-white illustrations. Lund Humphries. £39.  
0-85331-510-8

DAVID ELLIOTT  
*New Worlds: Russian art and Society 1900-1937*  
160pp, with 323 illustrations. Thames and Hudson. £12.95.  
0-500-01397-7

The late Camilla Gray's *The Great Experiment: Russian Art 1863-1922* was first published in 1962. The Paris-fixer view of modern art history was under attack. Expressionism, Italian Futurism, Dada, the Bauhaus were all hot news, but Russian Modernism was still remote, screened by the language barrier and Soviet vetoes. Gray had had access to picture stores and archives that no foreigner has penetrated since, benefiting perhaps from a Soviet urge to appear amenable after the offence of Hungary. She brought back a great deal of information. At the back of her book were biographical summaries of her protagonists, a bibliography of Russian and Western publications and a selection of artists' texts in translation.

Thames and Hudson subsequently republished it in paperback under the amended title *The Russian Experiment in Art 1863-1922*. Gray's reluctance at any point to consider what lay behind the labels and the quotations helped to make her book more an adventure story than a study. And her decision to end at 1922, when some of the leading Russian artists emigrated to the West, seemed to suggest that she had no first-hand knowledge of the more inaccessable work — with all its new developments — done in Moscow after that date. A better terminus might have been 1925, when the Soviet displays at the Paris Exposition des Arts Décoratifs made such a strong impression amid

the chic. Better still to have gone on further. In the late 1960s, together with Gray and others, I went to Moscow to persuade the Ministry of Culture to collaborate on what we intended to be the great eye-opening demonstration of Russia's brilliant contribution to modern art and design. The show that resulted — *Art in Revolution* at the Hayward Gallery in 1971 — came close to being that, in spite of the Russians, who, though helpful on some points, were adamantly negative and — it seemed — uninterested on others. (When their shipment arrived, it excluded much of what they had promised.) Yet it was clear even then that these works were the subject of institutionally supported research in the Soviet Union, if not matter for public exhibition there.

Since then, key pieces of Russian Modernist art have been allowed to come to the West on exhibition. Western scholars are still refused access to works and documents but Russian research has proceeded steadily, surfacing occasionally in learned journals and guarded terms. Books have been published, not in Russia but usually in East Germany and Hungary. Gradually they appear in English editions. Over the years we have had books on Lissitzky, Malevich and Rodchenko. Selim O. Khan-Magomedov's massive survey of Soviet architecture of the 1920s, published in Vienna and West Berlin, awaits translation, as does a book on Tatlin, published in Hungary. Western scholars such as John Bowl, Andrei Nakov, John Milner, Angelica Rudenstine and Christina Lodder have worked diligently at extracting information through gaps in the system.

In Russia in the early twentieth century, interest in Western innovations in art was followed by an avid turning to native resources, even before war and internal strife isolated the country. The Revolution brought into the national leadership an avant-garde that saw political and social change echoing its own position, and was eager to supply the new Russia with a theory and practice of artistic production, hinted at in Marx but not spelt out by anyone in applicable detail. Lunacharsky, who had written that socialism's great task would be to "rebuild the edifice of culture", was a remarkably liberal Commissar of Enlightenment, and members of the avant-garde were ready to rebuild with optimism and gusto. Rejecting capitalism's definition of art as self-expression and its use of art as prestigious property and amusing decoration, they would develop an art capable of celebrating a convi-

tal, collective society and also of serving daily needs.

Dr Khan-Magomedov's *Rodchenko: The complete work* and his *Aleksandr Vesnin and Russian Constructivism* are mainly concerned with the many debates and the relatively few realized works through which two outstanding individuals pursued these ambitions. Both were artists and much else besides. Rodchenko, son of an urban peasant, was trained in art, gained the interest of Tatlin and Malevich, and went on to be one of the founders of Constructivism as well as a sculptor, photomontagist (a brilliant set of images for Mayakovsky's love poem "About That"), typographer and lay-out artist, furniture and interior designer, photographer, museum organizer and teacher. He is already quite well known in the West thanks to articles (including an early one by Camilla Gray), the Hungarian book, the exhibition and catalogue produced in 1979 by the Oxford Museum of Modern Art, and Christina Lodder's *Russian Constructivism*. Khan-Magomedov adds much but also leaves much untouched.

His *Rodchenko: The complete work* is an authoritative book, making thorough use of archival material. He gives almost all his attention to Rodchenko's place in the discussions and groupings that make up so much of Russian art history of the period: when equipment and materials are at a premium one can always give one's time to arguing. Some of Khan-Magomedov's detail is new and he incorporates much hitherto unpublished documentation. Unlike Western scholars, he distinguishes repeatedly, if not altogether clearly, between the theorists of Constructivism, ever ready to tell artists to change their ways, and the aims of the artists themselves. More specifically, he insists that Rodchenko, however often he may have spoken of the demise of art and of the need to shake off aesthetic values, remained essentially an artist, guided by artistic feeling even when engaged in the most utilitarian tasks. He confirms our impression of Rodchenko as a clever, restless young man, more eager to innovate than to develop or deepen, and thus perhaps not all that firmly attached to art in the first place. But when the theorists denounced all art as bourgeois and wanted artists to become factory workers, Rodchenko claimed special status for artist-engineers such as himself: "we are different... we know how to see". Follow the theorists closely, he said, and you fall "into the trap of the aesthetics of asceticism and philistinism". Yet he shaved his

head. The Rodchenko of this book is a more thoughtful and even busier man than we knew him to be — he appears to have set up the Soviet sections in the 1925 Paris exhibition single-handed, and to have produced most of what they contained. One cannot help feeling, however, that Khan-Magomedov's insistence that he was always an artist at heart could well be a way of rescuing him from the oubliette into which Soviet 1930s orthodoxy threw anyone who could be charged with experimentalism.

Aleksandr Vesnin is relatively new to us, although he has appeared in Western writings as the painter who worked alongside Rodchenko, Lyubov Popova, Varvara Stepanova and others and taught with Popova in the State Workshops. In histories of architecture he is presented as the youngest of the three Vesnin brothers who designed buildings, and sometimes actually built them, before and after the Revolution. Khan-Magomedov shows him to have been the creative spirit in the Vesnin office as well as one of the most influential and sympathetic figures of the 1920s. During 1921-23 he was the famous theatre director Tairov's chief designer. The set he invented for Tairov's production of the *The Man Who Was Thursday* was hailed in Russia as Constructivism's masterpiece and exhibited in Paris and Berlin in the spring of 1923, some months before Chesterton's crazy "nightmare" had its stage premiere in Moscow. Partly through that triumph, Vesnin emerged as the leader of a Constructivist faction in architecture, the Union of Contemporary Architecture (OSA). OSA was as keenly opposed to the Rationalists of the Association of New Architects (ASNOVA) as to the neo-classicists, dominant before the Revolution and triumphant again under Stalin. The Vesnins' best projects date from 1923, their competition designs for the Palace of Labour and for the Moscow offices of Leningradskaya Pravda. These manifest a transparent structure, displaying or at least suggesting internal functions. Their only ornamentation are masts and swags of antennae and the visual and aural address systems with which they hoped to challenge the cross-bearing cupolas and the bells all around them, proposing an impersonal, collectivist rhetoric not unlike that of Russian churches. When Stalin called for a rhetoric of might and pomp, Vesnin made his schemes more grandiose and indicated in them plenty of spaces for heroic statuary, but his career declined.

Both Rodchenko and Aleksandr Vesnin

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Lav-Strauss, Claude, translated by Roy Wills. *Anthropology and Myth: Lectures 1951-1982*. Oxford: Blackwell. 232pp. £25. 0 631 14474 9. 24/3/87.

## Architecture

Benton, Tim. *The Villas of Le Corbusier 1920-1930*. Yale UP. 224pp. illus. £25/£35. 0 300 03780 5. 24/3/87.

Guinness, Desmond, and Denis Donoghue. *Ascentancy Ireland: Papers read at a Clark Library Seminar 28 September 1985*. Los Angeles: William Andrews Clark Memorial Library. 54pp. illus. \$7.

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